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of the

Association for Mormon Letters

1997

Papers from 1995-96

Edited by
Lavina Fielding Anderson

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Salt Lake City, Utah
1997

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INTRODUCTION

This edition of the *Annual*, which collects papers given primarily at the 1996 annual meeting, held 13 January 1996 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, begins with the third annual lecture by a visiting writer, Gerald N. Lund, whose runaway best-seller series, *The Work and the Glory*, has revived the historical novel in Mormondom. The proceedings do not, unfortunately, include the presentations of our 1997 visiting writers, Elouise Bell, who presented her one-woman show of Patty Sessions, and Laurie Johnson, Sister LaFonda AlaMode and her Special Living Lessons for Relief Society.¹ Their hilarious presentations, which played to a packed house on 1 November 1996, cannot be adequately summarized in print. As the saying goes, you had to be present to win.

For the second year, the AML sponsored a session at the Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium in August 1996: Michael Austin, "Troped by the Mormons: Nineteenth-Century Latter-day Saints in Twentieth-Century American Detective Fiction" with a response by Karen Dick Austin.

The Association also continued its long-standing tradition of a conjoint meeting at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 25 October 1996, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Organized and chaired by Tessa Meyer Santiago, it featured four papers on the theme of "The Fifth Ordinance: Enduring to the End: Negotiating Middle-Aged Mormonism." Presenters included Levi S. Peterson, Susan Miller ("In Search of Our Mothers, In Search of Ourselves"), Paul and Beth Hedengren, and B. W. Jorgensen, whose paper, "Imagining Mormon Marriage, Part I: The Mythic, the Novelistic, and Jack Weyland's *Charly*," appears in this issue as a promise for the rest of the session which, we hope, will be in the 1998 *Annual*.

Among addresses presented at the 1996 annual meeting but not yet submitted for publication are: Dennis Clark, "Fantastic Joseph and Mimetic Readers: Gerald Lund, Scott Card, and the Great Divine in Mormon Fiction"; Donlu Thayer and Pat Pelissie, "Humor and Healing" (which included readings from their book, *Overcoming Co-Dependency Through the Elimination of Personal Relationships*); "About Being Female: Stories We Agree to Tell: Readings from a Feminist Theatre Seminar" presented by Dixie Smith, Nola Smith, Char Nelson, and Bob Nelson; and Fred C. Pinnegar, "The Poetry of Arthur Henry King."

—Lavina Fielding Anderson

¹See *Special Living Lessons for Relief Society Sisters* by Fonda AlaMode with Laurie Johnson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), for a text-and-photographs version.

Mormon Literature in Cyberspace: The New Frontier

Robert M. Hogge

On a chilly, breezy day thirty-five years ago, the thirty-fifth President of the United States delivered his inaugural address. I was mesmerized. Here at last was a communicator—young, handsome—a leader who would move us into the space age, a new frontier. I was nineteen. A dozen of us watched the inaugural ceremony on a black-and-white television set at Allen Hall on the Brigham Young University campus. I held my breath as Robert Frost read “The Gift Outright,” the typescript fluttering in his hands, his gray hair unkempt, his voice raspy but resonant. The inaugural ceremony was the culminating event of the presidential campaign. In previous months, I had watched the televised debates and the election itself, seeing the returns come in state by state, the popular vote almost evenly split, the excitement palpable as the youngest man ever was elected president of the United States.

I saw all of this and more through the electronic wizardry of television, the president and poet so close to me I felt as if I were on the inaugural platform with them.

Eight years later, in 1969, I began a twenty-year career as a teacher, manager, and leader in the United States Air Force. That same year, the Department of Defense created ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), an experiment in advanced communications, a joint research project in computer networking funded by the federal government and carried out at four major research universities: UCLA, Stanford, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah.¹ During my military career, I saw this experiment in military communications develop, expand, and diversify, eventually evolving into the worldwide electronic communications network known as the Internet.²

Then in 1984, George Orwell—at least his spir-

it—smiled a grave but wry smile as the Internet escaped from the Pentagon; personal computers (PCs) superseded IBM's totem mainframes, and William Gibson, another science-fiction writer, published his breakthrough novel *Neuromancer*, in which he helped us visualize cyberspace, “the space projected imaginatively by the games in video-arcades,” a space “like Plato's plane of ideal forms, a metaphorical space, a virtual reality.”³ That spatial reality, cyberspace, later came to be known as the Net, the Cloud, the Matrix, the Metaverse, the Datasphere, the Information Superhighway, and the Electronic Frontier. Today 50 million people in 160 countries have direct access to the Internet,⁴ a web of communication links open to the public—nonproprietary, communal, egalitarian. Millions of computer users have Internet access through their employers' or universities' networks. Many millions more tap in through dial-up accounts available at modest cost by Internet service providers like America Online or UtahWired.⁵

“But what does all of this have to do with the Association for Mormon Letters?” many of you might ask. Much indeed! For the first time ever in the Association's twenty-year history, we are now tapping in to cyberspace to tell others worldwide who we are, what we do, and why it matters. We are already entering the new frontier.

Let me explain.

In recent years, users of the Internet have achieved a new level of sophistication by creating the World Wide Web, a feature that merges graphics and text at an electronic address known as a “home page.” For example Gideon Burton has been developing, at Brigham Young University, a Mormon Literature home page. The home page is set up to introduce newcomers to the great variety of Mormon literature (through a sampler), to give interested people a quick

but thorough overview of Mormon literature (with articles written by leading scholars), to guide prospective authors of Mormon literature to a wide range of publishers and magazines that put out Mormon literature, and to assist scholars by providing a bibliographic database of all known Mormon literature.⁶ Currently we are planning an AML home page that will soon be linked to the Mormon literature home page. This electronic linkage will then provide added exposure and advertising for the AML with an electronic version of the quarterly newsletter and current postings about readings, conferences, and calls for papers.⁷

In addition to Gideon Burton's groundbreaking work at BYU on the World Wide Web, Benson Parkinson has fully implemented and moderated AML-List, an electronic mail (E-mail) discussion list at Weber State University.⁸ For those of you who might not yet be familiar with E-mail, it is similar in many ways to regular postal mail and is one of the most popular uses of the Internet. With E-mail a person can send messages worldwide to individuals or groups of people who share a common interest—as long as each receiver has access to the Internet. For group discussion of a common area of interest, such as Mormon literature, there are essentially two ways of setting up electronic mailing lists: (1) automated lists, in which subscribers send messages to a single E-mail address, which are then forwarded automatically to the group; and (2) moderated lists, in which a human operator screens all incoming messages, removes redundant or inappropriate ones, and forwards the others to the group. On either type of list, a moderator may intervene in various ways to keep the discussion focused; but on an automated list, the moderator has no opportunity to screen messages before they are delivered to the group. The AML Board voted in February 1995 to sponsor provisionally, for one year, a moderated mailing list in conjunction with the Department of English at Weber State University. Benson Parkinson is the moderator. Next month the AML Board will meet again to assess the value of AML-List and to determine if we will continue to sponsor it.⁹

In its eight months of operation, AML-List has allowed more than 100 subscribers to generate nearly 2,000 messages to each other on a variety of topics relating to Mormon literature.¹⁰ Widely discussed

topics have been the Book of Mormon as literature, Kushner's *Angels in America*, numerous attempts to define the nature and extent of Mormon literature, Gene England's *Bright Angels and Familiars*, Mormon drama, Lund's *The Work and the Glory* series of historical novels, the "three Nephites" in folklore and fiction, Orson Scott Card and other Mormon writers of science fiction and fantasy, Evenson's *Altmann's Tongue*, Heimerdinger's *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites*, LDS "home literature," sex in Mormon literature, and countless other thought-provoking topics.

Who subscribes to AML-List? In any given month, we gain some new people, lose a few others, and maintain a large core of subscribers who stay with us from month to month. Only about ten percent are members of the AML. The rest include both scholars and fans of Mormon literature, many of whom live far from the Wasatch Front but who, through the miracle of the Internet, interact almost as if they were in the same conference room at Weber State University. Let me tell you briefly about ten people who have subscribed to our list: Thayne Andersen, clinical director of an outpatient drug and alcohol program, Bassett Army Hospital, near Fairbanks, Alaska; Melissa Wunderly of Yuma, Arizona, a novelist who also participates in Orson Scott Card's Hatrack River Forum where she is one of the moderators; David Beer, a faculty member in the Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Illinois at Chicago; Holly Welker, a Ph.D. and M.F.A. candidate at the University of Iowa; William Burrell, Professor of Art, Amarillo College, Texas; Chye Teh from Malaysia, now on the faculty at Indiana University; Kevin Christensen, technical writer, Lawrence, Kansas; Yeechang Lee, an undergraduate at Columbia University; John Espley, a library cataloger at VPI, Blacksburg, Virginia; and Kathryn Kidd, a writer who administers two areas of American Online founded by Orson Scott Card, Hatrack River Forum, and Nauvoo Writer's Workshop.¹¹

A month ago, I sent an E-mail message to our current subscribers asking them to assess the value of the list for themselves personally. People from throughout the United States responded, many of them living in locations isolated from other people who are interested in discussing Mormon literature. Here are a few of the many responses I received:

"This list is unique in LDS cyberspace and fills a place that has been helpful to me, an avid reader of things Mormon" (Dave Combe, California). "This list is a valuable resource. I don't know many LDS in my home ward in Frederick, Maryland, with whom I can have this kind of discussion" (Marshall Hamilton). "I also use this list for collection-development purposes at BYU-Hawaii. Many titles of Mormon literature have been mentioned here that our Utah distributor would never think of sending us" (Marynelle Chew). "I enjoy AML-List very much. Some of the discussions are above my education. But it is a treat for me to read the discussions" (Dennis Shurtz, Arizona). And "AML-List is perhaps the only non-dogmatic, reasonable LDS list I have found on the Net" (R. W. Rasband, Missouri).¹² The value of AML-List to those outside the Wasatch Front is obvious. In cyberspace, many of them discover the Association for Mormon Letters for the first time. How I wish AML-List had existed during my military career when I lived in various locations throughout the United States and in the Republic of Korea, but never in Utah.

However, even in Utah, our membership is sparse in many areas, so we here too see great value in AML-List. From Salt Lake City, Richard C. Russell wrote: "This is one of the premiere lists since there is so little rancor and name-calling—and so much erudite, articulate, thoughtful, respectful, stimulating, inspiring, literate, and sublime communication." Thomas R. Valletta of Ogden penned these wry words: "As a confessed but unrepentant bibliophile, discovering AML has seriously compounded my costly addiction. Other than that, I can think of little influence AML has had upon me. Oh sure, the list aided me in developing and refining skills of reading and writing with discernment, but that's like helping a wino choose a superior wine!" From Salt Lake City, Jana Remy, author of "The Biblio File" column on AML-List, had this to say: "I really appreciate AML-List. I am between undergrad and grad school right now, and this list keeps me thinking and learning." Neal Kramer of Provo, Vice President and President-Elect of the AML, watched Benson Parkinson successfully juggle two roles on the list, those of moderator and participant, commenting: "One of the really nice things about AML-List has simply been watching the interplay between moderator and

Parkinson. It's nice to see a bright writer at work." And finally, Lavina Fielding Anderson, of Salt Lake City, Editor of AML's annual *Proceedings*, stated: "Just yesterday, someone from another list was saying she wanted to talk about gender stereotypes in Jack Weyland's novels or maybe even write a paper, and I was so thrilled that I could tell her not only about AML but also about AML-List."

Just before this luncheon today, many of you attended the session entitled "*Angels in America: Kushner Among the Mormons*." For me the session was particularly interesting because I have been "lurking" (reading E-mail messages, but not participating directly) for months on AML-List as three of our four presenters tested their ideas, critiqued each other, refined their positions, and developed their analyses. Last month I sent an E-mail message to Michael Austin, winner of this year's AML Award in Literary Criticism and author of a column on AML-List entitled "Critical Matters," asking him to explain to me the benefits he had received from his active participation on the list. Here are the four benefits he feels are crucial:

1. It is an incredible bibliographic resource. One of the areas I study is the representation of Mormons in popular fiction—science fiction, mystery novels, and the like. Some of the discussions we have had on AML-List have allowed me to root out sources and books I could never have found otherwise. There is no scholarly index one can go to to find, say, mystery novels with Mormon characters, but on a list of a hundred or so Mormons, four or five are bound to be mystery (and western and science fiction) fans. I think our discussion of these genres yielded about 30 titles—most of which I was entirely unfamiliar with.

2. It allows for the scholar to present ideas in a completely casual format. Essays have to be polished and footnoted, and conference papers have to be at least developed arguments, but a computer list allows for a very informal presentation of ideas. This has allowed me to test out theories and hunches without having to worry about falling on my face in a formal setting.

3. The feedback on an E-mail list is instant and usually better than anything one receives in a conference presentation. Since there are no time constraints on E-mail, people can read and respond at their leisure. Often this has forced me to refine arguments in response to valid criticisms or to scrap bad ideas altogether. Most scholars, I think, need feedback, and I believe the electronic format is the best way to get it.

4. I save the best for last. Most of us who are interested

in Mormon letters are in a situation where we are the only ones around with such an interest. I have been lucky at UCSB [University of California at Santa Barbara] to have Eric Hirschmann and Rob Bennett (fellow list members) in my ward to bounce ideas off; but even so, having two like-minded people in my area hardly constitutes a scholarly community. In my "other" life (18th-century literature), I belong to a group of three faculty members and ten graduate students who meet every month to read and discuss literature and theory. In addition, we have graduate seminars, lectures, and all kinds of casual discussions where we can work out our theoretical positions. But the Mormon scholarly community is so spread out that, in most cases, there will only be a few interested parties in a state, much less on a college campus. AML-List, then, gives us the kind of scholarly community we could not have anywhere else—since we are so spread out and far apart.

Thanks, Mike, for such a perceptive analysis of the value of AML-List. I too value the list. During the past eight months, I have read nearly all of the two thousand messages posted and have sent E-mail messages both openly to the group and privately to individuals on the list. And my actual reading of Mormon literature has increased exponentially, just by being a member of AML-List. Though the predictions in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*—that computers and television will threaten the very existence of the book—have certainly been quite prophetic in some segments of American society, the opposite is true for me personally. Because of electronic media—compact disks, educational TV, and the Internet, particularly AML-List—I now read more in Mormon literature and think more about what I have read.

What a pleasure it is to meet with you today—to listen to you present papers, to applaud your achievements, to be a recipient of your many kindnesses. What a privilege it has been to serve as your president and to work as a member of the AML Board for the past five years with those I respect and admire so much. It is an honor to be with you as we celebrate this new electronic frontier for the Association for Mormon Letters. Let us continue to move Mormon literature through cyberspace toward an ever-increasing worldwide audience.

ROBERT M. HOGGE is an Associate Professor of English at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah. Previously he was a twenty-year career

officer in the United States Air Force primarily assigned to the United States Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs as an Associate Professor of English and Director of the Academy's Technical Writing Program. He coauthored *The Stone Rolls Forth: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Southeastern Colorado, 1846-1986* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1988), and his poetry has appeared in *BYU Studies*, *Innisfree*, *Daedalus*, *Texture*, *Petroglyph*, and *Weber Studies*. This presidential address was delivered at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, January 13, 1996, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah.

NOTES

All quotations from electronic transmissions were posted on AML-List and are used by permission.

1. Many friends in the Air Force kept me up to date on ARPANET and its various developments and refinements, but publicly available sources will provide a brief history of its evolution into the Internet, such as "What Is the Internet? What Are Commercial Online Services?" *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Using and Documenting Electronic Sources* (Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 3-5.

2. For those who have not yet accessed the Internet but who would like to learn how to do so, many self-help books are available. I found this one useful: Mary Ann Pike and Tod G. Pike, *The Internet QuickStart* (Indianapolis, IN: Que Corporation, 1994).

3. I have extracted some of the ideas in this address from a special *Time* issue, "Welcome to Cyberspace." For the definitions of cyberspace and its historical development, see the title article by Philip Elmer-DeWitt, *Time* (Spring 1995), 4-11.

4. Benson Parkinson, author of *The MTC: Set Apart* (Salt Lake City, UT: Aspen, 1995), asked me where I had gotten the figures for the number of people using the Internet, and I told him I had picked them up while "surfing the Net." But by the time you read this presidential address (at a minimum one year after it was delivered, and, for many of you, years after that), these numbers will have probably grown exponentially. The accelerating changes occurring in today's "information age" make even documenting this presidential address problematic. Traditionally I would use "static" sources with dates of publication preceding the delivery of this address. But I wrote the address primarily to be given orally, an oration rather than a critical essay; so here I am today, July 3, 1996, almost six months after delivering the presidential address to those assembled at Westminster College, in a computer laboratory at Weber State University, reading through a stack of printed materials I've accumulated from the Internet, trying to give you, the "future" reader, the most current information, material that often has an "electronic date of publication" that comes after the actual day I delivered the address.

5. Just after I had given this presidential address, I met with several members of AML who had attended the luncheon to discuss some of the ideas I had expressed. At the end of that discussion, Benson Parkinson said to me, after the others had left, that he felt I had presented some slightly inaccurate information on how people have their computers hooked-up to the Internet, along with the costs involved for "domain registration." I asked him if he would be willing to help me correct the information before I submitted the address to the editor for publication in this *AML Annual*, and he said he would. So Benson wrote the last two sentences in this paragraph, and I quickly discarded the outdated material from Pike and Pike, *The Internet QuickStart*. What I learned from this experience is probably obvious to many of you. Books on such a quickly evolving technology as the Internet are probably outdated, to a certain extent, when they are published, so it's always wise to collaborate with an expert to make sure the information you're presenting is on the cutting edge of the technology.

6. Most of the sources I'll use throughout the rest of this address will

be electronic sources. All Internet sources are either from BYU's "Mormon Literature Web Site" or from AML-List (an electronic mail [E-mail] discussion list about Mormon literature) and are used by permission of the authors. Gideon Burton's "Mormon Literature Web Site" can be accessed on the Internet by those with web viewers (Netscape, Mosaic, LYNX, etc.), using this URL (Universal Resource Locator): <<http://humanities.byu.edu/MLDB/mlithome.htm>>. I accessed the web site in June 1996 and saw these "links": (1) The Association for Mormon Letters, (2) Mormon Literature Sampler, (3) Bibliography of Mormon Literature, (4) Mormon Criticism, (5) "Who's Who" in Mormon Literature, (6) "What's Where" in Mormon Literature, and (7) The Vision of Mormon Literature. Clicking the mouse on one of these links will bring up available resource materials in each area. There are also links to other Mormon or Mormon-related sites, such as a master list of various LDS discussion groups. Many of the Web Site pages are in preliminary stages of development, and Gideon Burton would appreciate any feedback or help in assembling and putting onto the Net various texts and bibliographies. His E-mail address is <cburton@jkhbhr.byu.edu>. Gideon Burton gave me this E-mail update on the "Mormon Literature Web Site" on May 14, 1996: "By summer's end, 1996, nearly all of the published proceedings from AML will be online (full text). During the next year the heart of the resource, an electronic bibliography, should become available."

7. Benson Parkinson, Moderator of AML-List, developed the AML-List Homepage on April 22, 1996, featuring subscription information, list and review guidelines, the complete list archives updated nightly, a special review archive, and an index of members who have introduced themselves on AML-List. On May 15, 1996, Parkinson updated the homepage to include links to the Mormon Arts Festival at Tuacahn, as well as to the Utah Shakespearean Festival in Cedar City. The AML-List Homepage can be accessed at:

<<http://cc.weber.edu/~byparkinson/aml-list.html>>

Or you can access the list archives directly at:

<<http://cc.weber.edu/aml/archives.html>>.

I accessed the AML-List Homepage in June 1996 and found, in addition to the links already mentioned, an announcement of AML-List Magazine (AML-Mag), a low-volume, high quality, read-only list drawn from posts to AML-List, along with several other interesting links, such as Gregory Woodhouse's "LDS Resources." To subscribe to AML-List, send an E-mail message to <AML-Request@cc.weber.edu> as follows: Subscribe AML-List "Your Name" <your@e-mail.address>. Please include quotes and brackets. To subscribe to AML-Mag, send a message to the same address, substituting the word AML-Mag for AML-List. Benson Parkinson would appreciate feedback and help. His E-mail address is <byparkinson@cc.weber.edu>.

8. Through Levi Peterson's influence at Weber State University as Chairman of the Department of English, AML-List was authorized as a "Mormon literature discussion list" at the university. With that authorization, Benson Parkinson has successfully moderated the list for more than a year now.

9. The AML Board met Wednesday, February 22, 1996, in Salt Lake City, to plan activities for the coming year. A primary issue was evaluating AML-List and its future. For a personal report on the meeting, see Benson Parkinson, "AML-List, the AML, and Me," 22 February 1996. Here is a brief summary: The AML Board unanimously approved continuing AML-List indefinitely with Benson Parkinson as moderator. He was also added to the AML Board (to be confirmed by the membership at the 1997 annual meeting) as an *ex-officio* (non-voting) member.

10. The 2,000 messages represent simply the public messages sent to everyone on the list, not the innumerable private messages that also occur. Benson Parkinson publishes statistics regularly on AML-List. See,

for example, Benson Parkinson, "AML-List Stats," 1 May 1996. At that time, there were 162 total subscribers, representing 33 states (including Washington, D.C.) and 7 countries. AML-List is quite active with about 20 to 30 posts each day. But on April 30, 1996, AML-List saw a record of 52 posts. For the moderator's reaction, see Benson Parkinson, "Heavy Posting," May 1, 1996.

11. I picked these ten names for rhetorical effect to show ethnic, geographical, and professional diversity. Some of these people are no longer members of AML-List (July 1996), and other names quickly come to mind of those who make a regular contribution to the success of this discussion list, such as our regular columnists: Jana Remy, "The Biblio File" (quality book lists); Mindy Steadman, "The Prose Sampler" (extracts of passages from books new and old); Mike Austin, "Critical Matters" (literary criticism); Scott Parkin, "Worlds Without Number" (speculative fiction); and Richard Rust, "Feasting on the Word" (the language of the scriptures).

12. Clark Goble regularly posts on AML-List a four-part listing of "LDS Internet Resources." The last update I have is December 9, 1995. In Part 1, he discusses New Listings (mailing lists or web pages that have appeared recently), Mailing Lists (services, such as AML-List, from which all E-mail messages sent to the list are forwarded to everyone subscribed to the list), Mormon Oriented Lists (ELIJAH-L, a discussion of genealogy usually from an LDS perspective). Part 2 continues Mormon Oriented Lists (EYRING-L, discussions of Mormonism and science, for example). Part 3 introduces General Lists, those that are of interest for Mormons studying the scriptures, but designed for a more general audience (ARCH-L, for discussions about general archaeology) and Usenet Newsgroups (<soc.religion.christian.bible-study>, a discussion of the Bible from a variety of Christian traditions). And Part 4 lists Web Pages and FTP Sites: (1) Pages with Links to Other LDS Resources, (2) Pages for Organizations and Texts, (3) Pages for Web-Based Bookstores, (4) Pages with News, (5) Pages Relating to Genealogy, (6) Pages for Missions, and (7) Other Relevant Pages. For further information, Clark Goble's E-mail address is <cgoble@fiber.net>. See also Clark Goble, "LDS Internet Resources," Parts 1-4, December 9, 1995.

Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Association for Mormon Letters Presented to Gerald N. Lund 13 January 1996

The Association for Mormon letters is pleased to extend an Honorary Lifetime Membership to Gerald N. Lund—Zone Administrator for the LDS Church Educational System and author of *The Work and the Glory*.

Gerald Lund has worn many Mormon hats. He is a husband and father. He has served as father of his ward. His administrative posts in the Church Office Building have required fatherly support and strengthening of CES employees the world over.

Beyond these responsibilities, for which "Jerry" Lund is loved and respected by family, friends, and associates, "Gerald" Lund is devoted to teaching. His teaching has had two foci—the need to tell the truth and the need to tell it straight to young Latter-day Saints. Countless parents in Zion are grateful for his efforts to touch individuals as well as prepare curricula that strengthen testimonies and enable conversion.

Telling the truth has led Lund to write fiction. This seeming paradox has generated a phenomenon as yet unparalleled in Mormon letters. Each volume of *The Work and the Glory* has become a best-seller by any standard, and that in a small and exclusive market. The books' popularity has spread by the enthusiastic recommendation of readers who range in age from nine to ninety-seven. Not only are his books purchased and presented as obligatory gifts, but they are also read . . . and re-read.

In an age where the narrative has all but disappeared from history, Lund's story of the dynamic Steed family's intersections with the marvelous and wonderful account of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ has filled a gap in Mormon culture. Without deemphasizing the facts, Lund has reemphasized the story. He has made it possible for his readers, as they identify with the fallible and faithful Steeds, to witness the Restoration.

When reading these stories strengthens our desire to bear witness, Gerald N. Lund has succeeded. He has helped to bring to pass the real work and the glory.

The Gospel and the Arts

Gerald N. Lund

INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank Richard Cracroft for that introduction. I particularly appreciated his mention of the "center" from which I write, the stance of devotion to the Church. I shall say more about that. I remember a review of the first volume of *The Work and the Glory*. (This was before we knew it was going to go on *ad infinitum*.) I didn't keep it so I cannot quote it exactly, but the writer said something like this: "Obviously Gerald Lund writes from an unabashedly faithful perspective." I wasn't sure if that was meant to be a compliment or a criticism, but I took it as a compliment and still work from that stance today.

I really am pleased and greatly honored to be the speaker at this event. I heartily endorse the concept of gathering together in an association that fosters love for and the stimulation of that particular form of art we call literature as it relates to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I chose for my topic, "The Gospel and the Arts." I did so after some weeks of thinking about this after Brother Kramer extended the invitation to speak to you. The title has two elements: the gospel and the arts. I think that's appropriate. Both elements are present in the title of this association: The Association for *Mormon* (suggesting the gospel) *Letters* (suggesting the arts).

Most of you I suspect are interested in literature. I will speak a great deal about literature tonight, but I'm not going to confine myself to it because much of what I have to say has application in music, in drama, and in the visual arts as well. The issues that I want to discuss, I believe, transcend artistic boundaries.

It's been my experience and my privilege to associate with, know, and be related to artists in various areas. My wife writes and composes music. Her

brother is a teacher of voice and a professional opera singer. My brother Grant has spent a lifetime in the visual arts, teaching in a university in the Midwest. We have neighbors who paint and sculpt. Another family in our ward has paintings hanging in galleries around the West. As part of my work with the Church Educational System (CES), we produce various pieces of media, so it has also been my privilege to associate with producers, directors, actors, musicians, cinematographers, and the other people who are involved in making a movie. It's been a great opportunity to associate with them and explore the creative process that produces what we call the arts.

I've spent thirty-one years in the CES. I am by both profession and avocation a teacher. I probably branched into writing because I found it was a very tricky and sneaky way to teach without readers suspecting that they were being taught. A thirteen-year-old came to me recently and said, "You know, I just finished *The Alliance* for the twelfth time. It just occurred to me. You were really teaching us about free agency, weren't you?" I don't know whether to blame him or myself for the fact that it took him twelve readings to come to that conclusion. But from this long and dual perspective as a teacher and a writer and associating with others in the arts, I've come to some conclusions that are the things I wish to talk about tonight.

I need to warn you that this is a deeply personal essay. It will probably be more of my own musings and reflections than a formal dissertation. Some of you will certainly disagree with my premises and conclusions. You should know—and I truly mean this—that your disagreement will neither surprise me nor disturb me. This is an exploration, and I welcome the opportunity to articulate some of these feelings. They have been on my mind off and on for

many years now. Since this invitation, they have been on my mind almost constantly for the last two or three months.

THE GOSPEL AND THE ARTS: A SYNERGISM

I'd like to introduce a model of aesthetic judgment to deal with some persistent questions about art; e.g., What is good art? What is bad art? What is an acceptable moral standard in art? What can we do as Mormon artists? What can't we do? These questions become pertinent for those of us who claim to be actively engaged and have a strong allegiance to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There are many dilemmas that arise. What I'd like to do is not to try and proselyte or convert you to my way of thinking but rather to propose a model for judging art and invite you to examine it. I'd like you to test it out in your own laboratory of experience. The model is still in development. I suspect if I were to give this talk a year from now, you'd find significant differences as I've had a chance to hammer on the metal and see how it holds up.

I'll be citing numerous people tonight. My older brother Grant has had a particularly profound influence on my life. He's spent perhaps thirty-five years wrestling with the issues of creativity, the gospel, the arts, and all of the interrelationships that come from those elements. He did his dissertation on the process of creativity. Out of that, he wrote a book called *Christ and the Creative Individual*. He's now working on a series of essays, which he hopes will be published, called *Art and Basic Human Needs*. Many of the things I will say tonight were stimulated by long conversations we have had. I won't be able to cite him every time his influence crops up in my presentation, but it has been a profound and important one.

This model, which I'll introduce in a few moments, is rooted in synergism. Synergism is what happens when you take two or more individual, unique entities or parts, combine them, and get a product or effect that is different from and greater than the sum of all the parts. Synergism is when you add A, B, and C together and get D—which is different from A + B + C. This is a very important concept. The opposite of synergism is antagonism, when things are opposite to and clashing with each other. In synergism, things work together in a

harmony and create new energy, new power, new functions, and new results.

A simple example of synergism is a lock and a key—two separate, very different entities. Combine them, and you get a new functioning unit that was not possible for either of the separate parts. A more profound example of synergism is marriage between a man and a woman, two very unique, disparate, different individuals joining their lives together to create things that could never be created alone or even if they joined together in a simple partnership.

For me there are two great circles of influence in my life. One is the gospel. Without question, the gospel carries profound influence and also great power. It can transform human beings and return them to God. I also believe that art is a great circle of influence. It too has the power to change feelings, influence behavior, or impact values. I can think of cases where art has even had a tremendous impact on national identity. Some years ago I read that Hitler banned any playing of "Finlandia" in Finland during World War II. Why? Because that piece of music engendered such feelings in the Finnish people that instant rebellion followed any performance. Hitler thus banned this piece of art because of its power to influence identity and emotion.

I strongly believe that the gospel and the arts are overlapping circles and that, in the interaction between the two, important synergism occurs. I suppose there are many influential artists out there who would disagree with my conclusion that these two circles overlap. Some of them, I'm sure, would say that the arts and religion are antagonistic, not synergistic. My deep conviction is just the opposite. I believe the arts can energize and deepen our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, can help us understand the principles and standards required of us to be disciples of Jesus Christ. I also believe that the gospel can infuse art with meaning, vision, greatness, and so on. But this synergism that results from joining art and the gospel also brings some interesting challenges, questions that are—to be kindly put—thorny. Or to put it more bluntly, these questions are downright troublesome. It was in wrestling with issues like these that I devised this model for measuring and judging the balance between the gospel and the arts.

SYNERGISM AND SOME QUESTIONS

Question No. 1: What is the balance between artistic freedom and gospel responsibility?

A Latter-day Saint writer describes the seamy side of life in a work because he believes that he is trying to show the negative side of evil. Some of his readers are shocked and offended and say this has nothing to do with the gospel. Who is right? Is there a right? If there are boundaries set on an artist, can it really be called artistic freedom? And if there are no boundaries, are we true to gospel principles or is it only license?

A couple of months ago, a well-known writer and I were discussing the balance between artistic freedom and gospel responsibility. Here was the example we used as we wrestled with the issues. Let's say a novelist's character is swept up in Mafia society and comes in close contact with a Mafia don. This Latter-day Saint writer firmly and strongly is against profanity. He neither uses nor condones profanity. But in this novel, the don has just lost a \$3 million drug deal. Now, what does the writer have the Mafia don say? "Oh, darn"? I don't think so. And there is the dilemma. Does the author have a responsibility as a writer who is against profanity to not use profanity? But what responsibility does he have to be true to a character's nature? It's a dilemma.

Question No. 2: What is the relationship between form and content in the arts? I remember hearing of a teacher in our seminary system. She was an early morning teacher. Daunted, I'm sure, by the challenge of teaching the Old Testament, she started her class with these words: "Students, your parents probably don't let you go see R-rated movies because they are violent. They depict murder, adultery, immorality, etc. Well, you'll be happy to know that this year we're going to study all of those things—murder, adultery, incest, homosexuality. . . ."

Art has both form and content; in art, they must be blended together. In one way the teacher was right. The Old Testament does deal with those themes (i.e., the content) and does so unflinchingly. But to suggest that Hollywood and the biblical writers handle that content in the same way is a gross misrepresentation. The Old Testament deals with violence—the house of Israel was certainly caught up in violence of many kinds. But its form is significantly more restrained than Hollywood's

tendency to spatter blood on the screen in images ten times the size of life and do so in Technicolor and stereophonic sound. It may be a similar message, but its form is very different.

In *Art and Basic Human Needs*, my brother Grant comments:

There is a tendency to isolate form and content when evaluating contemporary art. Art which is done with a high level of skill and sensitivity in the form is often called good, even though the content is destructive to the integration of a society. [On the other hand,] much of contemporary religious art is so poorly executed that the significant message is corrupted. (184)

In other words, in some cases in religious art, the message—the gospel, the Savior—is wonderful, but the execution is so mediocre that the power of the message is lost.

Marilyn Arnold wrote an outstanding article analyzing this relationship between form and content for Mormon writers and readers:

We find, then, some Mormon readers who demand nothing more of writers than inoffensive content, and some literary critics who demand nothing more of writers than technical dexterity.

Truly great literature, on the other hand, is produced only in the integration of significant content with significant art. Readers have a right to demand that the literature they read tells the truth and at the same time moves them by the power of its thought and art. . . .

Some writers in the Mormon culture, for example, rightly want to affirm Church practices and beliefs. So they construct a story or a verse in which the characters or the narrators rather mechanically recite the clichés that we have all read or heard dozens of times in talks and lessons and conversations. Even the rebels in these pieces sound like all the rebels we have ever heard or ever heard described. Thus, our society [meaning the Latter-day Saint society] has adopted a set of acceptable attitudes and aphorisms which writers simply rehearse over and over again. When this moralistic but artless writing is accepted as the model for Mormon literature, it perpetuates itself and the gifted Mormon writer has a difficult time finding an audience. Too many readers [in the Church] would rather have their backs scratched than their minds engaged. (25)

So the balance between form and content, between message and medium, is one of the challenges we have to deal with.

Question No. 3: Are the elements of good or bad

art purely a matter of personal preference and taste?

Some of the most common phrases we hear would lead us to believe the answer to that question is yes. For example: "There's no accounting for taste." "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." "One man's meat is another man's poison."

Is that really true? Is it all a matter of taste? Well, in some cases, it truly is. Olives rank on my list of foods somewhere between moldy bread and dirty bath water. Others of you have a great and wonderful taste for olives. I don't understand it, but I know it's so. I believe the differences in our feelings about olives are just a matter of taste. The same is true with clothes. Some of you like louder colors, some more subdued. I think that is a matter of personal preference and taste.

But is pornography simply a matter of taste? Is it bad because we Latter-day Saint simply don't agree with the standards? To others, is pornography all right? While most of us would balk at calling olives good or bad, in the case of poisonous or polluted foods, we would have general agreement if we label them "bad." If there are things that damage the soul—poisonous images, poisonous literature, poisonous movies—can we really argue that it is purely a matter of personal preference?

THE THREE E'S: A MODEL FOR JUDGING

Can you see the kind of troublesome questions raised by this issue of trying to join art and the gospel? It was from wrestling with these and many other related issues that the model or paradigm I wish to present to you was born. It is designed not as a theoretical model, but as a pragmatic way to measure the value of what you do as an artist. Or, if you wish, it can be used to measure the value of other art. It is highly personal and, as I said before, a personal exploration more than a formal proposal. But it is proving to be very productive and stimulating in my own life.

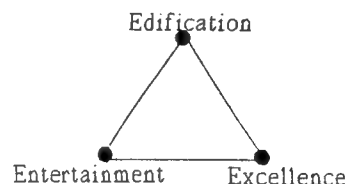
I call the model the three E's. The model is based on three fundamental principles that can be represented by an equilateral triangle. Its three points are the fundamental principles or anchor points of the model. The concept of "anchor points" is another contribution from Grant. An anchor point is a place to which you can tie something fast so that when the

wind blows or the current drifts, you don't get blown away or driven onto the rocks. The three anchor points, each a word starting with E, are the key elements of the model. Joining the points or elements with lines so they form a triangle suggests their interdependence with each other. They are linked together. They interact. Synergism takes place. They are not three separate concepts, but one model of judging with three different anchoring points. Only in the joining comes the energy and the power. No two alone would be sufficient.

Some years ago in a class, I was given the challenge of trying to balance a heavy book such as my scriptures on one finger. I suppose if I worked long enough at it, I could do it. But even if I could, it would be quite precarious. With two fingers, it's still precarious but much better. But if I add my thumb to the two fingers, then there is a solid platform on which the book can rest. Three points provide stability and balance.

As another example of the power of three: In my younger years, we kept a cow on a small acreage in rural Salt Lake County. My dad had us milk using a one-legged stool. We quickly learned to be very, very careful how we positioned the stool before putting our weight on it. We were also quick to learn that we didn't shift our weight very much once we were settled. But a three-legged stool doesn't have that problem. It gives stability; it's something that will carry weight without shifting out from under it.

In our model, the three elements for judging the value of art and evaluating how it relates to the gospel are *entertainment*, *excellence*, and *edification*.



ENTERTAINMENT

First, let's discuss entertainment as an artistic value. I can sense an immediate bristling by some at my use of this term when speaking of art. I used it once with a group of writers and heard a response something like this: "To worry about making my

writing entertaining is a sell-out. It is pandering to the baser, non-artistic side of humanity." Someone else said, "Art and entertainment are two completely different things."

As we commonly use the term, that is probably true. Entertainment is much broader than the arts. Going to an amusement park and riding the roller coaster is entertainment. But I'm using the term as it is limited to those areas of entertainment that embrace the arts and bring them about: drama, theater, literature, music, television, movies.

Let me define entertainment as I am using the term. It comes from two interesting Latin roots. The prefix *inter* means "between," suggesting something that links or joins two or more things together. We use the prefix in many words in the English language: "interaction," "intercontinental," etc. It suggests a linkage. *Tenere* comes from the Latin root which means "to hold" (Blacker, 4). A similar root, *tenac*, from which comes our word "tenacity," means to "hold fast." Thus, "inter-tenare" means a linking together between us and that which we watch or read or listen to that seizes us or holds us tightly in its grasp.

In fiction, it is probably the easiest to see that quality of entertainment as I'm using the term. Here are phrases that are constantly used about what are considered good books: "It's a real page-turner." "I couldn't put it down." "I stayed up until two o'clock last night reading it."

In other words, these readers found themselves held fast, or "entertained." A statement from another writer that has profoundly influenced my own approach to fiction comes from Eric Ambler. He said: "A novel, whatever else it may do for the reader spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually *ought* to entertain; otherwise, it is just a tract" (1; emphasis his). That's a wonderful concept and illustrates the very sense in which I am using entertainment.

A screenwriter included the word *entertainment* in his glossary of terms. Said he: "[Entertainment is] the least the viewer has a right to demand of a screenplay" (Blacker, 4).

I don't believe this power to hold is found just in literature either. I work in the Church Office Building. I'm coming up on my twenty-second year there. Hanging in the lobby reception area of the Church Educational System offices is a long, narrow painting

titled simply *The Grove Awaits* by Kent R. Wallis. Any of you who have attended the Institute of Religion at Utah State University will remember that the same painting has been made into a mural on the wall of its main reception area. I don't know if Wallis painted the mural as well or if it is a copy of the original, but it is a marvelous painting. Great towering trees fill the whole frame. Then, as you look more closely, there is one tiny, insignificant figure approaching, moving toward the grove, moving toward the destiny that we know awaits him. After twenty-two years of seeing that painting, it still seizes my eye and catches my attention again and again. Is not that "entertainment" in the sense that I use the term?

I have a small replica of Bernini's sculpture of David sitting on the bookcase in my office. Most of our seminary teachers, when they go to Rome, buy a replica of Michelangelo's David, but Bernini's is my favorite. It is David facing Goliath, body tensed for action in wonderful angles, eyes fixed on his target, sling in hand. I love that piece of art. Each time my eye goes to it, it holds me or "entertains" me.

One more example: Some years ago, my wife and I were visiting our CES coordinator in Germany. As he and his wife went into the kitchen to fix dinner, he handed me a large book and said, "You may find this interesting." The book was in Dutch (Poortvliet). I couldn't read one word. But it is a book I purchased for myself when I returned home because of its power. It is a series of illustrations of the life of Christ. For forty minutes, I was absolutely gripped, inspired, and held by the power of that art. That's entertainment in the fuller sense of the word. It's more than titillation, more than mere amusement. It's the blending of form and content so that it seizes the inner core of our being; and in that interaction, something important happens.

It seems to me that there is a great hunger in our country today for meaning. I was in the airport at Christmastime to pick up my children arriving from California, and I walked into the little airport bookstore. It's not what you'd call a great bookstore, so it surprised me to see that one entire shelf of that limited space was devoted to books related to what we would call spiritual or value-driven topics: Bettye Eadie's *Embraced by the Light*, Richard Paul Evans's

The Christmas Box, Jack Canfield's and Mark Victor Hansen's *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and William J. Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* and also his *The Moral Compass*. It was amazing to me that, even with such limited numbers and a focus primarily on best-sellers, there were that many value-oriented books. I think there's a reason for that. People are hungry for art that entertains and teaches values as well.

One last thought on entertainment as it relates to the arts and the gospel, and that is the word *recreation*. I don't know if you've thought much about that connection. The word comes from the Latin verb meaning "restoration, recovery, or renewal." The idea is that of the *re-creation* of something within us. Yet much of what is going on in the United States today is *wreck-reation*. It's destructive, it's debilitating, and it's disintegrating. There's a hunger for art and entertainment that holds us and gives us meaning. This is why I made entertainment the first point of my triangular paradigm.

EXCELLENCE

The second point of our model is excellence. The etymology of the word *excellence* is likewise interesting. *Ex* is a prefix meaning "to take out of or pull out of" and *cellere* means "to rise high or to tower up." So literally, excellence means "to rise out of or to tower upwards." Thus, excellence is to rise above the commonplace.

In the gospel sense, excellence has to do with such roots as holiness or perfection. In the arts, two words commonly used to describe excellence are "integration" or "wholeness." I was fascinated to learn that *holy* and *wholeness* come from the same root. *Integration* and *integrity* also come from the same root. This connection can become a definition of what is good and what is excellent. Goodness or righteousness is that which leads us to be more like God. God is wholeness *and* holiness. Evil or badness can be defined as that which leads to disintegration or pulling apart or disunity. Pornography, for example, is evil or bad because it stimulates but only in a way that leads to disintegration—of the individual, of the family, and of society.

Excellence brings some interesting challenges to the artist. I'd like to mention four. The first challenge is our own nature. In Tom Peters's and Bob

Waterman's book, *In Search of Excellence*, they describe some research about how people perceive themselves. The results also have application in the arts and in the Church as well. Here is what they say:

In a recent psychological study when a random sample of male adults were asked to rank themselves on "the ability to get along with others," *all* subjects, 100 percent, put themselves in the top half of the population, . . . and a full 25 percent ever so humbly thought they were in the top 1 percent of the population. In a parallel finding, 70 percent rated themselves in the top quartile in leadership; only 2 percent felt they were below average as leaders. Finally, in an area in which self-deception should be hard for most males, at least, 60 percent said they were in the top quartile of athletic ability; only 6 percent said they were below average.

We all think we're tops. We're exuberantly, wildly irrational about ourselves. (56-57)

That's an interesting insight into human nature. This high opinion of oneself manifests itself again and again in the arts. Years ago, a woman came to my wife, who is a song-writer and a composer. She said, "I've written some lyrics. I'd like you to write the music." She handed Lynn a bank deposit slip. Lynn looked a little baffled, and the woman explained, "I was in line at a drive-in window at the bank, and suddenly these lyrics just came pouring into my mind. I was inspired. I didn't have anything to write on, so I just grabbed the bank deposit slip and scribbled them out while I was waiting." And that is just exactly what they looked like—as if they'd been scribbled out in a moment's effort while waiting in line at the bank. And yet in her eyes she had been inspired and she was convinced the lyrics were really something profound.

Over and over, I've had people tell me, "I've written a story. I've written a novel. I was inspired." Yet, when I've read what they've done, the quality has been poor or inadequate. I've struggled with that for many years. Then, just the other day, I came across what I think is a good explanation for why this is so. My brother wrote in one of his essays:

Going back to the question, "Can good art be bad and can bad art be good?" the answer is yes when analyzed rationally. In many university art departments the students will bring in an image that has great meaning for them, and the faculty will be appalled. The student[s] are looking at the piece for the meaning (content) it has for them and the

faculty is evaluating purely on its formal (form) elements. It is good art (content) for the student and bad art (form) for the faculty. Often neither understand[s] what the other is thinking. (257)

That's one of the challenges for us when we say that blending the gospel and art should be done with excellence. There are people who say, "But excellence is what I have done" while others are saying, "This is not good at all."

Excellence comes not just from individual pieces but from relationships. It's not just what has been put together but how they've been put together. A simple analogy illustrates this well. Let's suppose I say, "I'm going to give you a cherry pie to eat. Okay, here's one cup of lard—eat that. Now here are two cups of sugar and four cups of cherries—eat them, please." It is not quite pie, is it? It is the blending of the elements together and letting the synergy happen that makes a cherry pie. The same is true in art. Part of our challenge of achieving excellence in the arts is getting the right relationship, not just the right elements.

Another challenge—and this one is particularly significant for me—has to do with the process of creating. It is another of the great insights I've gained from my brother Grant. In Doctrine and Covenants 8:2-3 we find the Lord's definition of revelation, and also, I think, of inspiration. This passage defines two elements.

Yea, behold, I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

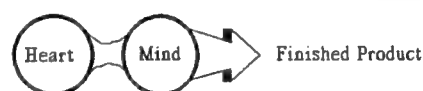
Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. (D&C 8:2-3; emphasis mine.)

The mind and the heart are two different parts of our being. Think of them for a moment as two circles that are separated somewhat but of the same size. The heart, or what the world calls the inner self, is usually intuitive. In the mind, the processes are more *rational*—a word that comes from the Latin root that means "to reason, compute or think." The heart, the intuitive self, thinks holistically. We see whole images, whole ideas, whole concepts. The mind tends to be linear and sequential—producing

not images as much as words, phrases, and smaller concepts. The heart is best at synthesis. The mind is best at analysis. The heart looks for meaning. The mind looks for understanding. The heart is the seat of creativity. The mind is typically the seat of skill and talent.

Most great art begins in the heart—music, art, painting. But to make it a reality, it has to go through and come out of the mind, and this can be a difficult and challenging process. The heart sees whole images, but the hand has to paint one brush stroke at a time. The heart hears whole melodies, but the fingers have to write them down one note at a time. Making that transition is like passing things through a narrow conduit between the heart and the mind.

Getting whatever I'm feeling in that inner part of me out into reality not only takes great effort but also, almost always, the image or the vision suffers in the process. I love the Stephen Sondheim song sung by Barbra Streisand on her *Broadway Album*, "The Art of Making Art." How do you do it? The song talks about putting it together "part by part," "piece by piece." As I thought about the reality of that, a scripture came to mind: "Strait [meaning "narrow"] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14).



As I've come to understand this process of taking the creative things from the heart and bringing them into reality through the mind, I revised that scripture a little. I think we could say: "Strait is the gate that leadeth to excellence. Narrow is that little path by which we have to come to excellence, and few there be that find it." It takes tremendous effort and energy to bring the product of our hearts through the mind and into reality.

And that brings us to the fourth challenge in seeking excellence. I can illustrate this best with a series of experiences and observations from everyday life. Someone once said, "Good books [or one could also say good poetry, good music, or good plays], are not written. They are *rewritten*." Recently I was rereading an interview with a famous writer—well,

not too famous since I didn't recognize his name. The interviewer asked, "In just a few words, how would you define the writing process?" He answered with just three words: "Damn hard work." I wish I had written his name down or clipped the article so I could give him credit for it. I wholeheartedly agree. If you can't see the truth of this statement, you don't understand the challenge of excellence.

Another example: Over and over, people have come to me and said, "I'd really like to write a book. What do I do?"

"Write it."

"Well, I'm not sure if a publisher will like it. Can I just go to them first and explain it?"

"No, I recommend that you don't go to them first. If you do go to the publisher and share the idea, one of two things will happen. First, you risk not describing that idea very well and they may turn you down. Then it will be very difficult to sell them anything. Second, if they do like the idea, what are they going to tell you to do? 'Write the book and let us see it.' So don't go to them. Just write it." That's always my advice.

And do you know what I hear over and over? "Oh boy. I don't want to go to all that work if they aren't going to accept it. I just don't know if I want to take that risk."

So I say, "Don't."

One of my daughters accompanied me to a group that I had addressed; and afterwards a woman came up and, very gently and not in an obnoxious way, expressed real fascination with how much money I was making off *The Work and the Glory* series. She kept saying things like, "I see it everywhere. There must be great sales," or "There must be thousands of copies in print, so you must make a lot of money off that." I didn't rise to the bait and respond one way or another. I could tell she was disappointed.

After we had left, my daughter said, "You know, Dad, it's interesting to me that she didn't ask you how many nights you spent on the computer. She didn't want to know how many days of your vacation you use to write the series. She didn't talk about all the nights you're away from your family." And then she made this absolutely wonderful summary of the situation: "You know what, Dad? She wants none of the work and all of the glory."

That's what most people want. They're not willing

to pay the price that leads to excellence.

What is talent? Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, who was the speaker here two years ago, made a comment in the book she co-wrote with Emma Lou Thayne:

A number of years ago, I told a friend of mine that I wished I could draw the way she did. "You could do it if you were willing to take the time," she answered. I thought she was being unreasonable. After all, she had a talent for drawing and I didn't. As I have thought about it more, I have come to believe that talent is an inner drive that propels a person to take time. People who are experts at something work harder at it than the rest of us because they see (and hear and taste and feel) possibilities the rest of us can't discern—the stairway in the side of a rock, the hat or vest in a yard of cloth, the unfulfilled potential of an organization. People with talent help us see what is hidden. (12-13).

That's an interesting definition of talent. People who are experts at something work harder at it than the rest of us because they see and hear and taste and feel possibilities the rest of us do not discern. That's what it takes for excellence.

As reported in a recent *Church News*, President Gordon B. Hinckley was at BYU paying tribute to outgoing President Rex Lee. As part of that speech he made this very significant statement: "Work is the miracle by which talent is brought to the surface and dreams become reality" (qtd. in "Prophet" 4).

Tremendous effort, that is what it takes. But many do not want to pay that price for excellence. Someone once said: "The typical overnight sensation takes just about fifteen to twenty years." That's a great statement and true more often than not.

EDIFICATION

The third anchoring point on the triangle, the third "E" by which we judge the merit of a work of art, is edification. Perhaps in the joining of art and the gospel, this aspect may be the most important. It is certainly one of the most challenging. *Edification* is etymologically related to *edifice*. Both words come from the Latin *aedes*, which means "house," but more especially a "temple." That's fascinating to me. Edification suggests that we're building some kind of structure spiritually. It's something that ennobles, lifts, and expands what we do. In the Doctrine and Covenants 50:21-23, the Lord gives us some very

direct counsel. Although the context there is about teaching the gospel, I can't help but wonder if it doesn't apply to the arts as well.

Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?

Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.

And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. (D&C 50:21-23)

That last statement is rather sobering. I ask myself if we could not paraphrase that scripture to read:

Wherefore, when one writeth [or painteth or composeth or singeth or acteth] by the spirit of truth, both he that writeth and he that readeth will understand and will rejoice together. And if your art doth not edify, it is not of God.

Some may disagree with that interpretation, but I think the scripture has profound implications for what we do, those of us who seek to create art.

So edification becomes the third anchor point. It's the balance to entertainment and excellence. It's something more than entertainment and excellence. It balances them, but they also balance it. If the concern was only for edification, then we would get those who say, "As long as my theme is religious, I don't have to worry about its excellence or whether it has the power to seize or hold someone." The three elements work together. Some Latter-day Saint artists think, "If it's gospel-centered, it's enough." And sometimes that attitude results in shoddy work or what I call the "uninspiring inspirational pieces."

Edification is not limited to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not strictly religious. Some of the great edifying works of art, music, statuary, and literature really have nothing to do with the Mormon Church. Think of the great power of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* to stir the soul, to inspire one to want to be better, to struggle against adversity. That's what we're talking about. That work is edifying. Thus, edification becomes the third important part of our evaluation paradigm.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR THE LDS ARTIST

Let me conclude with some questions related to the relationship between entertainment, excellence, and edification for those of us who are actively seeking to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We can't explore all of the possible relationships, but one important aspect has to do with covenants and covenant making. In the Church, we believe that covenants are how we bind ourselves to God and that, as we do so, covenants are a means of gaining great blessings.

For example, at baptism, we covenant to feel and act toward our fellow beings in special ways. According to Mosiah 18:8-10, we covenant to bear one another's burdens, to mourn with those who mourn, to comfort those who need comfort. In light of those covenants we have made, will we be held accountable not only for how we treat others, but also for how we influence others? If our art influences others, will there be an accounting there as well?

Can we really talk about unlimited artistic freedom if we make sacred covenants with God? As part of the baptismal covenant, we promise "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9). If our art does not edify and is not therefore of God, have we fulfilled that covenant to stand as witnesses of him?

Why is it that some Latter-day Saint artists, as they rise to prominence, seem almost ashamed to acknowledge what they stand for? I'm not talking about those who say, "The Church really doesn't have it for me." I'm talking about those who want to stay active members. This may be a personal thing—maybe I'm the only one who's seeing this—but I've seen it enough that it's beginning to look like somewhat of a pattern to my mind. We get offhand comments, little jokes, subtle slams against the Church, or against what we believe. There is almost a sense of them saying, "Yes, I *am* a Mormon, but it's all right. I'm still cool." Sometimes it's even manifested in the way they dress. And I think of that covenant—to stand as a witness of God in all times and in all places. Is there a relationship? Elder Boyd K. Packer said:

It is sad but true that, almost as a rule, our most gifted members are drawn to the world. They who are most capable to preserve our cultural heritage and to extend it, because of the enticements of the world, seek rather to replace it. That is so easy to do because for the most part they do not have that intent. They think that what they do is to improve it. Unfortunately many of them will live to learn that indeed, "Many men struggle to climb to reach the top of the ladder only to find that it is leaning against the wrong wall." (284-85)

At the sacrament table, we covenant to take the name of Christ upon us. If his name is our name, as that seems to imply, and we put our name on a book or a painting or a musical composition we have created, what are the implications of that for the Savior? Would he be pleased to have his name on what we have produced?

In the sacramental covenants, we're promised that if we always remember him, we'll have his Spirit to be with us (D&C 20:77). Does always remembering him extend to the process of creativity and making art? If we were to always have his Spirit to be with us, what influence would that have on what we create?

Elder Packer, in the same address as previously quoted, said:

It is a mistake to assume that one can follow the ways of the world and then somehow, in a moment of intruded inspiration, compose a great anthem of the Restoration, or in a moment of singular inspiration paint the great painting. When it is done, it will be done by one who has yearned and tried and longed fervently to do it, not by one who has condescended to do it. It will take quite as much preparation and work as any masterpiece, and a very different kind of inspiration. (281)

In the temple we make promises about consecration, about speaking evil of the Lord's servants, about living the gospel, about service, and about sacrifice. How would and should the keeping of those covenants influence our efforts as we write or paint or sing or compose?

SUMMARY

As I told you and warned you at first, this topic is a very personal exploration and declaration. If you disagree with my conclusions, that neither surprises nor disturbs me. Each must resolve these matters in his or her own heart. I have found this three-point

model useful for judging, particularly my own efforts, what is acceptable as I try to blend art and the gospel. You may not. But in summary:

First, it must be entertainment in its best sense. It must hold, reach out, and grab. There's a piece of music by Edvard Grieg, a movement in the Holberg Suite, called "Andante Religioso." It doesn't matter what I'm doing—whether I'm typing at the computer or working in the house. When that music comes on, I stop. That music is very quiet. It is not dramatic. But it seizes me (or "entertains" me) because of the power of the art. We should strive to have entertainment in our art.

Excellence is the second of the anchoring points. Excellence is that quality by which form, function, medium, and message all come together in a way that we're moved toward integration and wholeness, or holiness. Excellence is present when the viewer of a piece of art or the reader of a piece of literature doesn't just say, "Well, that's nice," or "That's pretty," but says things like "Oh, my!" or "Wow!" or "Yes! That's it exactly! That's *it*!" Excellence means to tower above the common. I hope we move to that in Latter-day Saint art.

And finally the third anchor point—edification. To edify means to build, to ennoble, to lift, to strengthen, to enrich. As God himself has said, if it does not edify, it is not of God.

Let me close with a simple scripture. Until I began thinking about the arts and the gospel, I didn't pay any particular attention to this scripture. I didn't even have it marked in my Doctrine and Covenants. Now I treasure it and go back to it often because of the meaning it has for me.

Behold, I speak unto you, and also to all those who have desires to bring forth and establish this work;

And no one can assist in this work except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care. (D&C 12:7-8)

That's the key verse. I believe the creative arts are one of those things entrusted to our care. Then he concludes: "Behold, I am the light and the life of the world, that speak these words, therefore give *heed with your might* [a call for excellence?], and then you are called. Amen" (D&C 12:9; emphasis mine).

I bear that witness to you—that in the blending of these two great spheres of influence, the gospel and the arts—we can move forward and achieve things that will truly move, lift, and inspire the spirits of those who share our art with us. I leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Re-Storying the Restoration: Gerald N. Lund's *The Work and the Glory* Saga and the Historical Novel

Richard H. Cracroft

I

Gerald N. Lund's *The Work and the Glory* series (1990-95) has been phenomenal in the history of Mormon fiction. *Pillar of Light* (1990), Volume 1 in the series, has sold more than 200,000 copies to date, and each of the succeeding six volumes has also been a runaway best-seller in Mormon country. The Association for Mormon Letters has honored two volumes as the best LDS novels of the year (1991, 1993), and the series to date has won both the Frankie and John K. Orton Award for LDS Literature (1994) and the LDS Independent Booksellers' Book of the Year Award (1994).

The overwhelming success of *The Work and the Glory* presents no head-scratching enigma to Latter-day Saint readers and literary critics. The landmark series is the impressive result of choosing the right: the right author, the right story, the right time, the right audience, and, I mean to suggest in this study, the right genre. Lund comes fitly framed and well-disciplined to the staggering task of rekindling the fire in the Mormon bosom through dusting-off, rediscovering, relighting, and rechronicling the astounding story of those first twenty-five glory years of the Restoration for a constituency at a long remove from the life and times of Joseph Smith, Jr. Driven by a strong personal faith and a profound need to teach the restored gospel to "the rising generation," Lund has taught the youth of Zion for more than thirty years as an LDS seminary and institute teacher, and has authored three gospel treatises, including *Jesus Christ and the Plan of Salvation*; and by the time he began writing *The Work and the Glory*, he was already the seasoned author of four novels, *One in Thine Hand* (an LDS novel), *The Alliance*, *Leverage Point*, and *The Freedom Factor*.

Amid the general acclaim for *The Work and the*

Glory series, however, some familiar questions seem to have arisen among the LDS literati as they begin to pay merited critical attention to this popular and spiritually refreshing literary anomaly. After discovering that *The Work and the Glory* is not the Polyannish "maudlin Mormon mush" (AML-List 12/1/95) that some anticipated, but sound history, well-researched and well-balanced; and good literature, well-paced, well-imagined, and well-told, LDS critics have begun to register the same kinds of criticisms which arise in respect to other historical novels, from such towering works as William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), which have safely outlasted the onus long attached to the historical novel, to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), Irving Stone's *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1961), and any book by James Michener, all of which still hover outside the canon of literary respectability, as do such Mormon historical novels as Vardis Fisher's *Children of God* (1939), Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* (1941), Orson Scott Card's *Saints* (1984), and, more recently, Marilyn Brown's *Statehood* (1995). Each of these historical novels, to which we now add the seven volumes in *The Work and the Glory* series, eventually raises the old generic questions, "Is it sound history?" and "Is it art?"

Lund encounters these dismissive questions with some regularity. He observed in a recent letter that "some people feel like they have to confront me with the fact that they are above reading" historical novels, and described a recent confrontation with a faculty member at a northerly Utah university who went out of his way to point out to Lund that

he did not read historical fiction because it was inaccurate and untrustworthy and that one is better off getting it from the original sources. I told him that I was really quite capable of handling the fact that some

people did not want to read my books but found it a little surprising that he had come to his conclusions about the series without ever having cracked the cover. Obviously irritated, he walked away and didn't say anything more. (Lund, Letter)

In assessing Lund's major contribution to Mormon Letters in *The Work and the Glory* series, it seems useful to our discussion, amid the continuing debate over the historical novel's heavy baggage, to consider Lund's series as remarkably successful examples of the historical novel genre.

II

Owen Wister, in his preface to *The Virginian*, asserts that "Any [fictional] narrative which presents faithfully a day and a generation is of necessity historical" (ix). Storytellers have combined fiction and history since Lucifer first dissembled to Eve in Eden, but it took a new, long view of history and Sir Walter Scott to establish the conditions and the criteria for the historical novel, which would rule Britannia (and Americana) for a half-century after Scott's death in 1832.

Since Scott published *Waverly* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), the historical novel has consistently gone about re-creating, historically and imaginatively, an age when two cultures, one nascent and one dying, are undergoing rapid change and come into conflict. The historical novel presents the history of the ascendant tribe and recollects the origins of the people, the nation, or institution. In chronicling a tribal history, the novelist must, as literary critic Richard M. Eastman points out, "exhibit a theory or at least a pattern of history" (81) and take a clear and unambiguous stance toward his subject as interpreter of and mediator between the storied past and his contemporary reading public.

In retelling history, the historical novelist is of necessity bounded and limited by historical fact, a condition that wields a historical tyranny that insists, both to author and reader, "This far, and no further!" In an attempt to move with imaginative freedom within these historical boundaries, the historical novelist takes up the story *in medeas res* and not at the very beginning and spares no time or space in spinning his or her tale. There is no such thing as a *short* historical novel, that requires room for reconstruction of the *milieu*, for re-creating a

sense of place, for enabling history to accrue, for finding its slower rhythm of inevitability, and for allowing its characters to ripen before facing the crucial historical moment.

The historical novelist, whose primary desire is to teach and inform and, second, to delight, also compensates for the demands of historical fact by creating fictional characters with whom the reader may identify, characters who, according to C. Hugh Holman and William Harman,

participate in actual historical events and move among actual personages from history; these fictional characters undergo and give expression to the impact of the historical events on people living through them, with the result that a picture of a bygone age is given in personal and immediate terms. (238-39)

Although the historical novelist may reprise the actions of a Napoleon, Michelangelo, or Joseph Smith, famous characters whom readers will already know, he enhances and refocuses familiar historical events by seeing them through the imagined points of view of anonymous, ordinary, and unknown participants who may be, like Kilroy, Forrest Gump, or Nathan Steed, fellow patriots, believers, companions, or crowd-swelling groundlings who, vicariously representing the reader, happen to be on stage, or in the wings, for the Great Event.

Georg Lukács, the incisive Hungarian and Marxist critic, points out in his defining study, *The Historical Romance* (1954), that Scott's nonreflexive heroes and the many bystanding, choral characters in historical novels since Scott, are necessarily "mediocre," "passive," and "wavering" (qtd. in Wesseling, 30). Though such characters may be ineffectual in dramatizing the conflicting historical forces, Lukács sees Scott's, or Tolstoy's, or Bulwer-Lytton's ordinarys—and would doubtless see Lund's Steed family likewise—as necessarily passive assets to the historical novelist. Unable to control the actions of his historic heroes, the novelist may turn every thought and act of his created characters to the service of what Lukács terms "the realistic representation of historical reality" (qtd. in Wesseling, 30). The bystanding characters are written into the story, not to draw attention to themselves, but to keep the reader's eyes single to the novelist's real story and fixed on those grand gestures and dramatic acts which will affect the

fate of the tribe.

For this cause, the bystanding characters in most historical novels are devoid of inwardness, though they are inward. In other words, readers may see the characters' inward thoughts as they report and respond to the historic events occurring around them, but they are themselves without individualistic Inwardness. But there's the rub: Such outward-focused characterization discomfits schooled contemporary readers and earns the disdain of modern critics—not only because many of the characters of the historical novel *à la* Scott seem to be two-dimensional anachronisms from an era when psychological realism was subordinate to the demands of external realism, but because the focus of the classical historical novel since the late nineteenth century continues to require, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the bystanding characters' relative and psychologically unacceptable simplicity in order to advance the demands and hold the focus of the unfolding epic.

III

It was 1885, or thereabouts, when the literary tide turned against the longstanding *données* of the historical novel. Literary critics, favoring Realism over Romanticism, and the self-centered complexities of individual human psychology over the panoramic sweep of tribes and nations, blamed Scott and faulted the genre for what they saw and continue to see as inherent literary problems. These faults have been pointed out in the work of virtually any historical novelist, for, in critical eyes, "All have sinned, yea, every one." Beginning with James Fenimore Cooper and continuing with Alessandro Manzoni, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, William Makepeace Thackeray, Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Henry Bulwer-Lytton, and Charles Reade, and continuing, with a twist, into the twentieth century with Hervey Allen, Kenneth Roberts, A. B. Guthrie, Jr., Robert Graves, Margaret Mitchell, Irving Stone, Leon Uris, James Michener, Norman Mailer, Thomas Berger, Bodie Thoene, Gore Vidal, John Barth, John Fowles, Erica Jong, or, in Mormon letters, Samuel W. Taylor, Paul Bailey, and the aforementioned Fisher, Whipple, Card, and Brown, and now, Gerald N. Lund, to name a few.

Each of these authors has written important historical novels; and in the advanced age of realism

qualified by minimalist and poststructuralism, each has encountered the criticism that attaches to the much-abused yet much-read historical novel. Each has also, with modifications, continued to shape his or her historical fictions according to Scott's time-honored but time-eclipsed pattern.

Although it is still too early for critical response to *The Work and the Glory* to have focused, such criticism, when it comes, will deal not only with the central problem of LDS literature, which is how to give credible human and literary expression to spiritual and intuitive impulses, but also with those familiar questions, "But is it history?" and "But is it art?" which dog the historical novel. For it remains a persistent and culturally embedded attitude in Western criticism that the historical novel is a not altogether respectable genre situated somewhere upscale from the cowboy and the detective novel, and just ahead and to the right of science fiction.

This uneasiness with the historical novel's pretensions to be at once history and art arose with the new science, the beginnings of modern psychology, and the art of modern fiction. After blowing away the smoke of battle, there remain three main faults that seem to inhere to any historical novel:

1. Critics fault the historical novel for its broad sweeps through history at the expense of shallow and uncomplicated characters who become representative types instead of individuals, and, as types, purveyors of a specious and stereotypical morality.

2. Critics question the confused purpose of the historical novelist's attempting, on one hand, to retrieve and replicate the external realities of an age, while, on the other hand, presuming to imagine fictively the consciousness and inner life of the ancients—a situation that makes inevitable what Lukács calls "a necessary anachronism" (Lukács 59-60). Henry James states bluntly his disdain for such anachronisms in a letter (5 Oct. 1901) to Sarah Orne Jewett, herself a local color historical novelist. Writes James:

The "historic" novel is, for me, condemned, even in cases of labour as delicate as yours, to a fatal *cheapness*, for the simple reason that the difficulty of the job is inordinate. . . . You may multiply the little facts that can be got from pictures and documents, relics and prints as much as you like—the real thing is almost

impossible to do and in its essence the whole effect is as nought. I mean the invention, the representation of the old CONSCIOUSNESS, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision of individuals in whose minds half the things that make ours, that make the modern world, were non-existent. You have to *think* with your modern apparatus a man, a woman—or rather fifty—whose own thinking was intensely otherwise conditioned, you have to simplify back by an amazing *tour de force*—and even then it's all humbug. (208)

3. As early as 1850, Alessandro Manzoni, author of *The Betrothed* (*I promessi sposi*, 1827), itself a classic historical novel, concluded in his remarkable study, "On the Historical Novel, and, in General, on Works Mixing History and Invention," that the historical novel is "deficient both as historiography and as poetry" because it wrongly attempts to mix fictional truth and the factual, an impossible combination. The historical novel fails as history, because it fuses historical facts and imaginary invention in such a manner that one cannot always differentiate between the two and thus corrupts historical knowledge and evokes uncertainty in the reader. (This same confusion in Lund's readers prompted Lund, after the publication of his first volume, to include differentiating endnotes in subsequent volumes.)

And the historical novel fails as art, insists Manzoni, when the novelist attempts to prevent the corruption of historical knowledge by somehow marking, setting off, and thus differentiating the fictional passages from the historical passages (as Lund has done with elucidating endnotes). The narrative is then in danger of failing as a unified, organic, literary work of art, concludes Manzoni, because the historical novel "does not have a logical purpose of its own; [instead,] it counterfeits two various and often contradictory purposes," those of literary art and history (76).

IV

Allow me, then, to offer some tentative comments about Lund's success, in *The Work and the Glory*, in coming to terms with these merits and demerits of the historical novel.

Lund's purpose, consonant with the purposes of the classical historical novelist, is to reify, recall, and

revivify the events of the restoration of the gospel for a believing but beleaguered constituency remote in time and thinking from those "marvelous-work-and-a-wonder" events clustered at the beginning of the Restoration. Lund's guiding, dramatic question, as he states it in the preface to *Pillar of Light*, is to tell the Mormon story so completely that each reader can answer the questions, "If I had been living back then, how would I have reacted? What would I have done? Would I have believed?" Lund writes, "*Pillar of Light* is an attempt to help them explore those questions in their hearts" (viii). This ongoing exploration unifies the series, as does the gradual unfolding of Mormonism's genesis story, already familiar to most readers.

Writing in another context, cultural critic Neil Postman points out the importance of the shared story, in this case, the foundational Mormon story, to the spiritual and communal well-being of the Mormon people:

Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence. . . . A story provides a structure for our perceptions; only through stories do facts assume any meaning whatsoever. . . . Nations need stories, just as people do, to provide themselves with a sense of continuity, or identity. (119-24)

In retelling the Restoration story, Lund reassembles and recounts the origins of his Mormon tribe, a story sacred to the Latter-day Saints, who trace in the history of their beginnings the moving finger of the Lord. This story *cum* myth has become sacred to the Mormon folk, a burning bush that must be approached with shoes removed. The historical novel genre, as rendered by a trusted fellow-believer, -enables a luminescence less likely with other forms, and garners the confidence of the Latter-day Saint reader. Other more psychologically realistic fictional techniques are off-putting to the Latter-day Saints when they feel, regardless of the author's literary skill, that their sacred story has been manhandled and violated, and thus profaned.

Beginning the story of the Restoration *in medias res* (as befits a historical novel), seven years after Joseph Smith's First Vision, Lund takes the time and space to provide the detail necessary to allow events to develop their own authenticity and density, find their own rhythm, fill in the blank spaces of the

familiar, and allow the reader to claim a personal sense of place amid the Saint-making and Saint-shaking events of a robust, thriving, still-innocent, pre-Civil War, pre-Darwinian, pre-Freudian, religiously enthusiastic, expectantly capitalistic, westering and Manifest Destinarian America—and in a brand-new church.

Lund mitigates some of the standard weaknesses of the historic novel simply by introducing to the average Mormon reader dozens of new, unfamiliar, and even rare stories. Consider this random selection of little-known but intriguing accounts: Lucy Smith's miraculous parting of the ice in Buffalo harbor (2:172); Mary Whitmer's being shown the gold plates by Moroni (2:75-77); Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner's account of the providential finding of three coins in the fish's stomach (2:387-88); the moving account of the death of David W. Patten (4:240); the misfiring of five pistols aimed at the Prophet Joseph by Missouri irregulars (4:370); the financial miracle of Brigham Young's and Heber C. Kimball's journey—they spent \$87 but originally had only \$13.50 between them (5:253); Wilford Woodruff's healing of the possessed madwoman (5:524); Joseph's prescience in instructing Israel Barlow to get a buggy-whip immediately, thus saving his life a few hours later (6:332); the Nauvoo plot to assassinate Joseph Smith (6:425-27); and three angels commanding Joseph to initiate plural marriage or be slain (6:478-79).

In the interest of grounding his story in both historical fact and fiction in contexts of a realistic nineteenth-century American frontier background, Lund "multipl[ies] the little facts," as Henry James called the process, through occasionally introducing into his narrative chunk-style cameos of Americana. In organically planting these factual cameos in his work, Lund is as good as or better than Vardis Fisher in *Children of God*, but not as successful as Orson Scott Card in *Saints* (1984), or Maurine Whipple in *The Giant Joshua* (1941), all of whom recall to mind Lukács's comments on the impossibility of the historical novelist's difficulty in introducing factual information into fiction. Lund sets the pattern early in Volume 1 by introducing interesting sketches about the Erie Canal, which runs through Palmyra. The pattern established, he then inserts occasional cameo sidebars about soapmaking, quern handmills, ice-

cutting and ice-storage, Cyrus H. McCormack's harvesting machine, McGuffey's Readers, sailing aboard the *S.S. Rochester*, the "Penny Black" postage stamp, the daguerreotype, and—what may be his best-treated and best-integrated cameo—the Mormon logging industry in the Wisconsin pineries.

Key to the unity and success of *The Work and the Glory* saga is Lund's creation of the bystanding Steed family. While the demands of history naturally command the boundaries of Lund's main plot, the interpolation into the series of the Steeds and, eventually, their spouses, children, and grandchildren, enables Lund to do what he does so well—write fiction. He crafts an exciting parallel story of the Steed family's various responses to Mormonism, creating scenes and characters that dramatize the immediate and personal impact of the events of the Restoration and early Mormon history on ordinary men and women who are at stage center or in the wings during the major events, yet remain at a remove from Joseph and Emma Smith and other key figures of the Restoration whom Lund and the reader wish to keep at a respectful and non-leveling distance, for, as Thomas Campbell observes, "Tis distance lends enchantment to the view" (Campbell, Pt. I, l. 7). Such fictional distancing of the Steed family from the Smith clan enables the reader to identify with the Steeds as they confront, variously and collectively, the implications of the Restoration in their lives.

At the same time, Lukács's "necessary anachronism" enables the reader to understand, from the perspective of 165 years, the larger currents and forces at work in nascent Mormonism. Furthermore, following the life and times of members of the Steed family continues to drive the reader while repeating the unstated dramatic question: How will Lund get the character out of this dilemma and back to Kirtland or Missouri or Nauvoo in time for the next Grand Event?

The Steeds' most important role as ordinary Latter-day Saints and bystanding characters is their mirroring the events and concerns of the main plot. As the historical novel demands of its ordinary bystanders, when the first converts are baptized, the Steeds undergo the dynamics of conversion and some of them are baptized; when the temple at Kirtland or Nauvoo is built, the Steeds participate; when there is

dying to be done at Haun's Mill, the Steeds' quasi-son-in-law, John Griffith, is killed; and when Joseph Smith's personal guard escorts him to Carthage, Nathan Steed is on hand. The Steeds are the Greek chorus of the Restoration. Through the family's individual waxings and wanings, all of which center in the events of the Restoration and the nascent Church, Lund subtly prods the reader to confront his or her answer to the series' overriding dramatic question, "If I had been living back then, how would I have reacted?"

It is amid the Steeds' comings and goings that Lund threads the answer he hopes to evoke in every reader. As a historical novelist, Lund takes a stand and points the path to belief and conversion. Rejecting the objective heresy of modern literature, Lund shows in all but a few members of the extended Steed clan that they, with him, believe in the divinity of every part of the Restoration and have faith in the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph. As Nathan expresses it to the Prophet Joseph after he and Lydia have passed their Abrahamic test over the doctrine of plural marriage (standing as proxies for the reader), "I have a hundred questions, but I have no doubts" (6:465); and the reader, hovering Walt-Whitman-like over the scene, nods in agreement.

With few exceptions, Lund's skillful integration of historical fact and fictional narrative reveals an artistry that makes one question Henry James's assertion that "the real thing is impossible to do." So clearly does Lund advance his players toward their inevitable goals and so clearly does the reader come to understand that God is directing the play that readers willingly suspend their insistence upon the Steed family's inwardness and complex psychology in order to play their roles in God's plan to get the plates translated, the temple dedicated, the mob turned, the conversion of the English effected, the Saints tested, the lame healed, polygamy undertaken, and the Prophet and Hyrum martyred. The unrolling of divine history makes "the real thing" possible, as the higher reality of God's wonder-working providence eclipses James's earth-bound Realism.

Lund avoids as much as possible the "necessary anachronism" of presentism and leaves to his readers the task of drawing parallels between themselves and their counterparts in the early Church. Only occasionally, for the sake of clarity, and that primarily in

Volume 6, does Lund drop from the fictional into the historical mode to bridge major events; and only occasionally does he intrude anachronistically to correct the record in light of contemporary Latter-day Saint interpretations. In Volume 6, *Praise to the Man*, for example, Lund clarifies Joseph Smith's potentially confusing misuse of the word *ordain*, instead of *set apart*, in organizing the Relief Society, a volatile matter in the 1990s Church (6:289); and at another point, Lund corrects, with a chapter note and a 1933 statement by the First Presidency, that "celestial marriage," not "plural marriage is required for exaltation" (6:447).

In attempting to keep fact untrammelled and his fiction free to range imaginatively, Lund unknowingly follows the counsel of the venerable historian Pierre Bayle, who, in 1701 advised novelists who cannot resist meddling with history to "annotate themselves in such a manner that the invented arts could be clearly distinguished from the historical ones" (qtd. in Wesseling, 34-35). Responding to the inquiries of readers who found it impossible to differentiate between fact and fiction in *Pillar of Light*, the first book in the series, Lund supplied endnotes for Volumes 2 and 3, and chapter notes for Volumes 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Lund's literary marriage of historical fact and imaginative fiction is, I believe, a happy one. For the most part, Lund seems to me to have overridden the literary problems posed by the historical novel by finding and rendering in inspired prose the remarkable unity and purpose of the Mormon people and the compelling story of the Restoration. Indeed, the historical novel, with its lofty aims and broad canvas, while admittedly at cross-purposes with contemporary art and criticism, seems to me, after all, to be an effective vehicle for conveying the epic of Mormonism. Perhaps it is time to take a cue from Professor Jane Tompkins, who, seeing that literary criticism had long excluded the sentimental and the domestic novel from the discussion, formulated a set of critical guidelines that would include such works as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the conversation. Perhaps, someday, the Latter-day Saints will have achieved the confidence and maturity to free themselves from dependency on critical modes which are not congenial to Mormonism.

In the meantime, Lund, in *The Work and the*

Glory, is accomplishing the "O-that-I-were-an-angel" dream of every institute, seminary, and born-again Gospel Doctrine teacher. With enormous personal effort and with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Lund has moved thousands of his people to press the spiritual re-set button and find in their Latter-day Saint faith renewed cohesion, purpose, direction, and inspiration.

Other ways and means of re-storying the Restoration will be forthcoming. Until the Second Coming downgrades the Restoration to old news, each generation will need to reassess, redefine, and renew its relationship with the stunning events of the Restoration. As new, imaginative works of art celebrate Mormonism's beginnings, however, each will be indebted to Gerald N. Lund and his landmark accomplishment in bringing to pass *The Work and the Glory*.

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Response

Gerald N. Lund

It's not a particularly comfortable experience to sit through a lengthy commentary on one's work, whether the comments are in praise or in criticism.

In view of the limited time, let me address what I think is the core issue. If there is anyone who recognizes the challenge of writing historical fiction, it is I.

There are several inherent challenges. There is no historical collection—no matter how wonderful—completely based on historical sources alone that provides enough information for a novelist to flesh out his or her novel. Conversations, emotions, and detailed descriptions of everyday events are just not part of what gets passed down to us consistently, so the novelist is forced to fill in with many things that are the result of his or her own creation.

There is no question about the danger of fictionalizing history. As Dick read that quote from Henry James, there was much in me that resonated with it. Let me give you just one example. In one of the early volumes, I have Lydia experiencing the death of a son during those early days at Nauvoo as the darkest of tragedies. However, one thing I've begun to sense about that day and age is that the death of children was much more common, and perhaps the sense of tragedy was softened somewhat because of the commonness of the experience. It is very difficult to get into the spirit and sense of another culture even if you immerse yourself in it.

I'll give you another example of how we attempt to impose our own views on the past. This last summer my wife, Lynn, and I took our family to Tuacahn near St. George to see *Utah!* We had a wonderful experience with that excellent production. Yet I was disturbed that Rachel Hamblin, as portrayed in the production, expressed resentment with plural marriage and fought against it. Why was I disturbed? Because in her own journal, contrary to the portrayal in the play, Rachel told Jacob something like this as he was preparing to go to Salt Lake City: "Don't you come back without another wife.

She will provide me company for the many days and nights that you are gone." So the "politically correct view" shown in the play was an imposition of the writer on what was historically not true in the past. That is fictionalizing history.

On the other hand, I've immersed myself in the historical sources trying to accurately portray history, and I've learned something about the historians. They have the same challenge as the novelist. There is no collection of historical sources that provides all the information one needs to write history either. It is not possible to know everything, nor can historians possibly write all they know. A good historian knows far more than he can put into a book. I further say that it is not possible for him to know all he writes, because he too has to interpret and extrapolate from limited sources.

Even primary sources can often be suspect. I learned this in researching about plural marriage. So much emotion was generated in that particular time in Nauvoo that it is very difficult to sort out what was true and what were bitter falsehoods. If a bitter falsehood is told and written down and passed on to us, does that make it any more valid because it's a "primary" source? Primary sources do not guarantee either truth or accuracy.

So it occurred to me long before this session today that while there is great danger in fictionalizing history, there is also great danger in "historicizing fiction"—to put our own interpretation and extrapolation into writing history and then pass it off as though it were actually history.

My own commitment in doing the series was to try and fill in those empty spaces in history while being as faithful to the sources as possible. But I admit that it is very difficult to escape your own interpretation and the weaknesses of being caught up in your own culture. For example, one of my characters in an earlier volume, in a moment of triumph, punches the air and shouts "Yes!", which is something which I've seriously repented of for about six

volumes now. My only excuse is to say that my purpose was not to write a text on Church history. My purpose was to tell the story of a family immersed in a time that was very important to us. And if the one fault of that work is relevance as has been suggested, I have to confess that that was exactly the purpose I had in mind when I started writing the series. So while I continue to wrestle with all of the concerns of historical fiction, I must admit that I am grateful that I knew none of these concerns about historical fiction at that time—that I just naively stepped off the cliff and began writing. Thank you.

Casserole Myth: Religious Motif and Inclusivity in *Angels in America*

John-Charles Duffy

Michael Evenden's review of *Angels in America*, published in *Sunstone*, was my first exposure to the play and remains to my knowledge one of only two substantial analyses of the play produced by a Mormon, a critical neglect that the Association for Mormon Letters helps to rectify. Evenden believes that Kushner represents Mormonism "as an irrelevant joke, a sinkhole of dead values" (56). The play's use of Mormon motifs constitutes, in Evenden's view, a "comic undercutting" of Mormon belief, an "unsympathetic reading" of the faith (59), an "elaborate, obscene burlesque," "comic blasphemy" (60), and "mockery" (62). Kushner also, Evenden claims, excludes believing, practicing Mormons from the utopic space that the play offers in its final scene. The play thus fails to practice the inclusivity it appears to preach: "as it happens," Evenden writes, "this poignant epilogue, like the play it follows, is considerably less inclusive than many have taken it to be; in fact, it may be just as exclusive as Kushner has implicitly accused the LDS Church of being" (61).

I believe Evenden has misread this play on two counts. First, what Evenden reads as mockery, obscene burlesque, and comic blasphemy is in fact, I argue, a fundamentally serious treatment of religious motifs. While it is true that Kushner treats these motifs as metaphors, not literal realities, and that he levels major criticisms at traditional religious systems, including Mormonism, it is also true that Kushner uses religious motifs to express ideas which, within this play, are deadly serious. In short, the religious motifs are not mocked. Second, while I agree with Evenden that Kushner's utopic vision is problematic, I maintain that his vision is indeed inclusive of Mormons, as well as believers from other religious traditions. The use of religious motifs in *Angels in America* itself exemplifies the inclusivity that the play preaches in its closing scene; the play

becomes a space in which religious motifs from a variety of traditions meet to create what I term a "casserole myth," an inclusive understanding of the world worked out by diverse individuals who come together to help each other make sense of their experiences. That this myth includes Mormon motifs is, I argue, a highly significant, highly admirable gesture of inclusivity on the part of an individual whom we as Mormons continue to exclude from our own utopia.

Why do I believe that the play's use of religious motifs is fundamentally serious?

To begin with, Kushner himself insists that the religious motifs must be treated seriously. In the description of the Taped Voice that accompanies the cast of characters for *Perestroika*, Kushner writes that the "taped intros [to the Mormon visitors center presentation and the council in heaven] should sound alike—not parodic but beautiful and serious, the way the unseen Angel sounds in *Millennium*" (5). And in the playwright's notes to *Perestroika*, Kushner states emphatically that the play is

not a farce. . . . The angel, the scenes in Heaven, Prior's prophet scenes are not lapses into some sort of elbow-in-the-ribs playing style. The angel is immensely august, serious, and dangerously powerful *always*, and Prior is running for his life, sick, scared, and alone. Every moment must be played for its reality, the terms always life and death. . . . Particularly in the final act [i.e., the scenes in Heaven] . . . the problems the characters face are finally among the hardest problems—how to let go of the past, how to change and lose with grace, how to keep going in the face of overwhelming suffering. (8-9; emphasis Kushner's)

It is to poetically represent these "hardest problems" that Kushner incorporates religious motifs into the play, and it is for that reason that the motifs must be regarded as fundamentally serious in intent.

I say "fundamentally" because Kushner admittedly spices the religious motifs with comic relief for the sake of defusing that which might otherwise wax sentimental. (In his playwright's notes, Kushner orders directors and actors to "eschew sentiment" [*Perestroika*, 8].) An example of this defusion occurs after Prior wrestles with the Angel in his hospital bed—a serious scene, the stage directions inform us: "the wrestling should begin in earnest and rapidly become furious, deadly" (*Perestroika*, 119). The Angel declares, echoing the story of Jacob's wrestling the angel in Genesis 32, "I have torn a muscle in my thigh." Prior retorts, "Big deal, my leg's been hurting for months" (*Perestroika*, 120). The humor relieves the tension created by the preceding wrestling match. It does not turn the scene into a mockery of the biblical motif here invoked (Jacob's wrestling the angel); on the contrary, the fact that Kushner feels the need to defuse the scene with comic relief is evidence that he regards the scene, with its religious motif, seriously and expects his audience to do the same.

And it is easy to see why this particular motif should be taken seriously: during this portion of the play, Prior makes the climactic decision to refuse to give up, despite having no reason to expect hope from the future. Prior here undergoes what Kushner identifies in the playwright's notes as the struggle to "keep going in the face of overwhelming suffering" (*Perestroika*, 9). Wrestling the Angel—who appears in this scene as the Angel of Death, dressed in black—symbolizes that struggle, with all its intensity. And since Joe has already, in *Millennium Approaches*, identified wrestling an angel as an impossible struggle ("How could anyone human win, what kind of fight is that?" [49-50]), Prior's victory is all the more significant: in winning the wrestling match, he has accomplished the impossible. If Kushner can be accused of anything at this point, it is not mockery, but a fervently earnest religious romanticism, an optimism of mythic proportions.

As Kushner uses the Jewish (Old Testament) motif of Jacob's wrestling the angel as a fundamentally serious symbolic representation of one of the play's messages (i.e., that human beings can find the strength to go on in the face of overwhelming suffering, to secure the blessing of "More Life" despite an apparent absence of hope), so Kushner

uses Mormon motifs as fundamentally serious symbolic representations of themes in the play. Consider, for example, the scene in the Mormon Visitors Center.

Evenden reads this scene as a "comic undercutting of visitors' center dioramas," which he says has produced in him a feeling of "mortified hilarity" (58-59). He does not specify those elements in the scene which have produced in him this feeling, but likely candidates include the dummies' artificial, melodramatic script and Harper's mocking commentary. I am convinced, however, that Kushner does not intend this scene to be a mocking parody. Anyone who's experienced *Legacy* or the Manti Temple pageant can testify that Kushner's artificial, melodramatic script simply constitutes verisimilitude. And while it is true that Harper undercuts the diorama presentation, it is also true that Harper is an unlikable, unreliable character at this point in the play, which makes me wary of assuming that Kushner intends to undercut the presentation. On the contrary, I have already cited Kushner's insistence that the taped introduction to the diorama presentation is not parodic; presumably the same can be said of the entire presentation. More importantly, the motif of the Mormon pioneer trek, portrayed in the diorama, figures the impulse to move on in spite of devastation and suffering, an impulse that in this play is supremely heroic; it is the same impulse that leads Prior to demand "More Life" in spite of the Angel's insistence that he should give up and stop moving. Later in the play, the Mormon pioneer trek becomes explicitly instructive. It is from the Mormon pioneer mother that Harper learns to change, to move on, to go on with her life in spite of pain. And Harper fairly clearly alludes to the Mormon pioneers when she tells Prior, "I've finally found the secret of all that Mormon energy. Devastation. That's what makes people migrate, build things. Heartbroken people do it, people who have lost love" (*Perestroika*, 122). Depressing as I find Harper's reflections, the idea of moving on in spite of (or rather, because of) devastation is a variation on Prior's assertion of his will to live in spite of the apparent absence of hope—again, the play's heroic ideal. And if the Mormon pioneer trek, as portrayed in the diorama, is another representation of that heroic ideal, it hardly makes sense for Kushner to comically under-

cut it. The pioneer motif must, therefore, be taken seriously.¹

This is not to say that the diorama scene reflects Kushner's uncritical admiration of Mormons. The artificiality of the diorama script may be intended to indicate that contemporary Mormons have lost touch with their roots; secure in our insular, institutionalized Zion (in which Salt Lake replaces the New Jerusalem as capital city), we no longer understand, and therefore cannot believably portray, the suffering of those who preceded us. In addition, Harper makes a piercing and dismally accurate comment on Mormonism's institutional sexism when she complains, "They don't have any lines, the sister and the mother. . . . That's not really fair" (*Perestroika*, 65). As I will demonstrate later, Kushner heartily disapproves of the Mormon claim, articulated by the pioneer father, that there can "only be One True Church. All else darkness . . ." (66). I also suspect that the father's description of Joseph Smith as "a strapping lad" (66) is meant to subversively introduce—or expose—homoeroticism in the founding myth of a church that eschews homosexuality. Kushner clearly has bones to pick with the Mormon Church, and he manipulates the pioneer motif in order to pick some of them. But these criticisms are peripheral to the core purpose of the pioneer motif in this play, i.e., to represent one of the play's most serious messages, the heroic ideal of moving on in the face of suffering and devastation. Criticisms of Mormonism notwithstanding, the incorporation of the motif into this scene is still fundamentally serious.

The same can be said of the Angel's appearance to Prior, which Evenden pronounces (59) an "elaborate, obscene burlesque of the First Vision and Moroni's subsequent visits" (which Kushner, like many non-Mormons, erroneously conflates). I can certainly see why Evenden responds this way. Prior and the Angel experience a mutual orgasm onstage. The Angel stumbles through her script. Prior puts up a humorous resistance to the Angel's demands ("No fucking way! The ceiling's bad enough. I'll lose the lease, I'll lose my security deposit, I'll wake the downstairs neighbors, their hysterical dog . . ." [*Perestroika*, 45]). And Prior's appearing in Charlton Heston's Moses drag to reject the book could at first glance seem, as Evenden judges it, "ludicrou[s]" and "ridiculous" (60).

Recall, however, that Kushner himself insists, in his playwright's notes, that he does not intend these scenes to be read as Evenden reads them ("Prior's prophet scenes are not lapses into some sort of elbow-in-the-ribs playing style" [*Perestroika*, 8]). Kushner attempts to neither recreate nor ridicule the motif of Moroni's visitations to Joseph Smith; rather, he adapts the motif to create a Mormonized version of the motif of Jacob's wrestling the angel. When Prior returns "The Book of the Anti-Migratory Epistle" to heaven, he is performing within the framework of Mormon religious motif the same symbolic act he performs within the framework of Jewish religious motif when he wrestles the Angel in his hospital bed and demands More Life.

By rejecting the Angel's book—with its message to give up, stop moving—Prior again heroically asserts his will to live, his determination to go on in the face of overwhelming suffering. Such, it seems clear to me, is the message Kushner intends to convey with his adaptation of the angelic visitation motif. And if the motif is to convey the message Kushner intends, the Angel must be seriously regarded as a symbol of heavenly authority; her message must be seen as compelling if Prior's rejection of the message is to be recognized as a heroic effort, just as the wrestling match between Prior and the Angel must be "furious, deadly" if Prior's victory there is to be recognized as a heroic effort.² Which is to say that the Angel must be, as Kushner insists she is meant to be, "immensely august, serious, and dangerously powerful *always*" (*Perestroika*, 8), not the center of some "elaborate, obscene burlesque" (Evenden, 59).

How then can we account for the apparent lapses into the obscene and ridiculous—the mutual orgasm, for instance, or the Charlton Heston drag?

First of all, I think we need to keep in mind that neither Kushner nor his intended audience adheres to the sort of morality that proscribes R-rated movies. Kushner writes for an audience who has no qualms about watching a man strip onstage or witnessing two men simulate anal intercourse—which is to say that Kushner does not write for most Mormons. So if most Mormons take offense at Kushner's play, they do so where no offense is intended. Indeed, in *Angels in America*, sex is treated not as something obscene, but as a symbol of positive values: health, life, and continuance.³ Note that

Belize regards the nocturnal emission that accompanies the Angel's first visit to Prior as a healthy sign, something long overdue: "Well about time. Miss Thing has been abstemious" (*Perestroika*, 23). Another nocturnal emission accompanies Prior's abrupt—miraculous—recovery after the council in heaven. Sex, then, goes hand in hand with health.

Kushner's intensely sexual Angel is, furthermore, part of an attempt to provide an alternative to the mechanistic (therefore lifeless) concept of the universe typical of post-Cartesian science; in the worldview propounded by the Angel, the universe is organic, full of life, and therefore full of sex: "Not Physics But Ecstasies Makes the Engine Run" (*Perestroika*, 47). In this universe, entropy does not swallow up all things in death; rather, there is ceaseless copulation, endless reproduction, eternal life in a sense. Prior's erections and the mutual orgasm identify the Angel as a representative of this organic, sexual universe, as an emissary of life, health, and therefore hope for the dying Prior. That the emissary of life comes preaching immobility is, of course, supremely ironic, and that irony both foreshadows and validates Prior's eventual rejection of the Angel's message. As knowing participants in an organic universe, the Angels ought to know better than to try to impose stasis.

The Angel's struggle to follow her script is a variation on this irony. In their desire for stasis, their desire to contain the otherwise unpredictable flow of human history, the Angels attempt to create a codified text—their script—by which to govern or determine both their actions and human history. Again, they ought to know better. In a mechanical, law-based universe, it would be possible to create a text or theory that eliminates indeterminacy—but not in an organic universe. As Hannah, Belize, and Louis reflect in *Perestroika*'s closing scene, the "sprawl of life" cannot be contained in a single codified, totalizing theory (146). And so the Angel discovers that reality will not be contained by her script; things do not happen "according to Plan" (*Perestroika*, 118). The Angel thus represents all systems, religious or political, which attempt to totalize human experience, which insist on the existence of one true church or one true theory.

By the same token, the book that the Angel gives Prior represents all sacred texts or codices of proce-

dures that profess closure, as the Angel professes closure by concluding her visitation to Prior with the words "The END" (*Perestroika*, 54). Like codified religious and political systems, the Angel claims to have the last word, the true theory, the solution to humanity's struggles. In rejecting the book, Prior also rejects the claim to closure, as Evenden correctly observes (60). In Kushner's view, there can be no last word, no theory or belief system to eliminate indeterminacy and the unknown.

This conclusion brings us to the concept of "casserole myth." Having rejected codified, totalizing theories or belief systems, Kushner turns instead to an organic, open-ended worldview. He describes the process by which this worldview comes into being in the afterword to *Perestroika*:

I have been blessed with remarkable friends, colleagues, comrades, collaborators: Together we organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it; we reflect it, refract it, criticize it, grieve over its savagery; and we help each other to discern, amidst the gathering dark, paths of resistance, pockets of peace, and places from whence hope may be plausibly expected. (158)

It is this process of organizing for themselves their understanding of the world in which we see Prior, Louis, Belize, and Hannah engaged in the play's closing scene. Drawing from Jewish, Christian, and Mormon sacred stories, they create together a new story, a new myth, the myth of their future cleansing and Prior's healing in the restored fountain of Bethesda.⁴ Note that this story is not a theory; it is not codified, nor does it attempt to totalize human experience. Louis hastens to assure the audience that he and the other characters regard the myth as a metaphor, not a literal prophecy ("Not literally in Jerusalem, I mean we don't want this to have sort of Zionist implications" [148]). But its metaphorical nature does not lessen the myth's importance as a space in which a variety of belief systems come together in a mutual expression of hope for the future.

It is this space that I call a casserole myth. I borrow the term "casserole" from my Latin American studies: unlike North Americans, who have traditionally regarded their culture as a melting pot, Latin Americans describe their culture as a casserole (*cazuela*), i.e., as a combination of elements from a variety

of cultures—Native American, Spanish, African, etc.—each of which has retained its identity rather than being assimilated into a mainstream culture. To borrow a phrase from *Angels in America*, Latin Americans regard their culture as a “melting pot where nothing melted” (*Millennium*, 10). Similarly, what I term a casserole myth is a combination of beliefs, these beliefs not being assimilated or reconciled into some new totalizing religious system but rather retaining their own identity in what becomes a noncodified, nontotalizing understanding of the world that expresses itself through a diversity of religious motifs and symbols.

Such is the myth created by Prior and company in the final scene of *Angels in America*. And indeed, *Angels in America* itself is a casserole myth. The cosmos in which this play is set is a hodge-podge of elements drawn from a variety of religious and quasi-religious sources. The wrestling-the-angel motif, the flaming alephs, the ladder on which Prior ascends into heaven, and the Kaddish for Roy Cohn are drawn from Judaism. The angelic-visitation motif, the peepstones, and the restoration rhetoric (“A marvelous work and a wonder we undertake. . . . The Great Work begins” [*Millennium*, 62, 119]) are drawn from Mormonism. The prominent role of sex in the workings of the cosmos, the hermaphroditic Angel, and the Angel’s multiple emanations—Fluor, Phosphor, Lumen, Candle—are elements of gnosticism, which Kushner may have encountered through the writings of Harold Bloom, who calls himself a Jewish gnostic. The Charlton Heston/Moses drag is drawn, obviously, from *The Ten Commandments*; since, as I have already shown, Kushner insists that the drag is not a lapse into an elbow-in-the-ribs playing style, I presume that the drag is employed as a widely recognized symbol of the prophetic vocation. (Personally, I think it’s pathetic that Americans’ concept of a prophet has been determined by Hollywood, but *c’est la vie*.) The play even incorporates several allusions to the film *The Wizard of Oz*, which, as a ubiquitous and at least vestigially archetypal story of the fantastic, is the closest thing to a mythic community text to be found within gay culture. Allusions to the film include the lines, “People come and go so quickly here” (*Millennium*, 34), “If you [c]annot find your [h]eart’s desire in your own backyard, you never lost it to begin with”

(*Perestroika*, 53), and several lines following Prior’s return from Heaven (“. . . but all the same I kept saying I want to go home. And they sent me home” [*Perestroika*, 140]).

The creation of this hodgepodge, this casserole, of religious and quasi-religious motifs becomes for Kushner an exercise in inclusivity. The creation of a casserole myth implicitly acknowledges that one’s own belief system is insufficient, that one can and must learn from the belief systems of others. By making *Angels in America* a casserole myth, Kushner invites his audience to learn from a variety of sources: Judaism, Mormonism, gnosticism, even *The Wizard of Oz*. I emphasize the inclusion of Mormonism in that list. By including Mormon motifs in his casserole myth, Kushner invites his audience to learn from Mormonism—even while he criticizes Mormonism as an institution for its condemnation of homosexuality and for its claim to totalization and closure. In short, Mormons are included in the common space created by Kushner’s play. Mormons are part of the “we” who, Kushner says, come together to “organize our understanding of [the world].” We as Mormons are, in a sense, among Kushner’s “comrades and collaborators.” We are part of the net of souls from which societies, the social world, human life, and this play have sprung (*Perestroika*, 158).

Granted, the inclusion of Mormons in Kushner’s myth-making space is problematic. For one thing, Kushner insists on treating as metaphorical motifs that believers regard as literal. When Hannah tells Prior that Joseph Smith’s prayer “made an angel,” one has to wonder how literally she believes, in spite of her declaration that “the angel was real” (*Perestroika*, 103). She waxes explicitly metaphorical when she tells Prior, “An angel is just a belief, with wings and arms that can carry you. . . . If it lets you down, reject it. Seek for something new” (105). This is hardly the standard Mormon understanding of Moroni’s visitations, a fact that lays Kushner open to the criticism that he allows not Mormonism but his own adaptation of Mormonism into his myth-making space.⁵ Kushner’s attempt to include Mormons in his utopia is also problematic because, as Evenden notes, Kushner insists that Mormons accept homosexuality as a legitimate option for relationships. Which is to say that Kushner excludes from his

supposedly inclusive space all Mormons who adhere to current Church doctrine regarding the immorality of homosexual relations.

Even so, Kushner has made a highly significant and highly admirable attempt at inclusivity—an attempt not to be readily expected from a gay activist. I myself am both gay and a believing Mormon; and as I've come out to the gay community, I've been disturbed by the ridicule and anger directed by many gays toward the LDS Church and other religions. I am therefore extremely impressed that Kushner would draw on religious traditions, including Mormonism, in the creation of his play's casserole myth. That he seriously employs our sacred stories and symbols into his sign system instead of simply ridiculing them, as so many others do, must be acknowledged as an inclusive gesture—a problematic gesture, true, but still an important first step toward reconciliation and community.

To conclude on a political note—and this play definitely invites political considerations—I am frustrated that we as Mormons are not reciprocating Kushner's attempt at inclusivity. Near the beginning of *Millennium Approaches*, Harper tells Prior, "In my church we don't believe in homosexuals" (32). When I first read this line in 1994, I read it as a poetic expression of the fact that Mormons believe homosexuality is immoral. I did not read the line literally, i.e., I did not take it to mean that Mormons deny the existence of homosexuals. Since then, however, Harper's statement has become literally true. One of the Twelve recently announced in the Church's official publication that Mormons do not believe that there is such a thing as "a homosexual"; it is doctrinally incorrect, he insists, to use the word "homosexual" as a noun (Oaks 9). This position greatly hinders, and may eliminate, the possibility of Mormons and homosexuals meeting in some inclusive space to help each other understand the world. And such exclusion I judge a loss for both parties.

I am excited by what Kushner has attempted in this play. The casserole myth-making process that *Angels in America* both advocates and exemplifies is the process in which I am now engaged as I struggle to work out my identity as a gay Mormon. I hope eventually to create my own Bethesda fountain, a space in which I can sit in community with fellow Mormons, fellow gays, my family, my lover. It will

no doubt be a long time before such a space exists; but depending on the response it receives, *Angels in America* could help pave the way.

The Great Work begins.

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NOTES

¹I am not the first to read the diorama scene in this way. In a response to Evenden's review published in the *Sunstone Readers' Forum*, David Callahan notes that the diorama scene is "comic, but beneath the humor is something profound and inspiring. It is here that Prior is exposed to the idea of migration in response to affliction. It is the idea he takes to heaven" (6). In turn, Evenden responds to Callahan by citing an *American Theatre* review in which, he says, Kushner "briskly dismisses Mormon theology, symbols, and ritual as 'so dumb'" (Callahan 7). This is a highly clipped quote, for which I would like to see the context; but even if Kushner does indeed dismiss Mormon belief as "so dumb," this dismissal does not undermine my interpretation of the play. Kushner is not, after all, Mormon and therefore might well be expected to find belief in a literal angelic visitation "dumb." Hence he uses Mormon motifs purely as metaphor; but as metaphor, the motifs are still employed seriously in the play. I am willing to concede Evenden's argument that "Kushner depicts Mormonism as a failure, and ultimately an enemy to a healthy, progressive community" (Callahan, 7), since for Kushner all codified belief systems, religious or political, are failures and enemies to community. However, as I will argue later, Kushner's serious use of Mormon motifs is an attempt to open up the possibility of Mormonism's becoming a contributor to the utopic community foreseen in the play's closing scene.

²It should be noted that the Angels are not altogether rejected anyway. It is they who finally bestow on Prior the blessing of More Life; and the final scene is acted out at the feet of the Bethesda angel, whom Prior refers to as a symbol of aspiration and hope ("they [angels] suggest a world without dying. . . . They are engines and instruments of flight") and of the reconciliation of difference ("they commemorate death but they suggest a world without dying. They are made of the heaviest things on earth . . . but they're winged, . . . instruments of flight" [*Perestroika*, 147]). The angel's presence in the final scene leaves open a space for religion, or at least for religious motifs seriously employed. And since Mormonism is characterized in this play by belief in angelic visitation, the angel's presence in the final scene seems to reserve a space especially for Mormonism.

³The sex between Louis and the would-be leatherman in Central Park is an obvious exception; in this scene, sex is associated with domination and pain, becoming an occasion for Louis to punish himself for his sin of abandoning Prior. In the scenes involving the Angel, however, my claim that sex functions as a signifier for positive values holds true.

⁴By way of elaboration: the Jewish contribution to the new story is the legend of the creation of Bethesda fountain by the angel's descent into the temple square. It is entirely appropriate that Louis, the Jewish character in this scene, relate this portion of the story. The Christian contribution to the story is the legend about the fountain's healing

powers as recorded in John 5. Belize tells this portion of the story—appropriately, as the play provides hints that Belize is, at least by upbringing, Christian. A black man with a Hispanic surname (Arriaga), Belize probably hails from a Caribbean country such as Cuba or the Dominican Republic. (Note that in *Millennium Approaches*, Belize brings Prior voodoo cream from “some little black Cubana witch in Miami” [59]). With a Latin background, Belize was likely raised Catholic. Furthermore, Prior refers to Belize at one point as “a Christian martyr” (*Millennium*, 61). Hannah, naturally, provides the Mormon contribution to the story, the prophecy of the fountain’s restoration during the Millennium. Evenden believes that this prophecy is “certainly . . . very foreign to Mormon tradition” (64 n. 8). On the contrary: as an adolescent fascinated by Mormon lore about the Second Coming, I encountered this very prophecy, which is drawn from Ezekiel 47. The characters’ new story, then, is a combination of Jewish, Christian, and Mormon elements, used to support a gay man with AIDS in his suffering—an unlikely or bizarre combination, perhaps, but definitely a powerful one.

⁷This charge does not greatly concern me, however, because such adaptation strikes me as unavoidable when one is creating a casserole myth. For example: in my own worldview, the writings of C. S. Lewis have been influential. However, because Lewis subscribes to a neo-Platonic version of Christianity which, as a Mormon, I believe to be an apostate version of Christianity, I must adapt Lewis’s ideas, or take them metaphorically (where he intends them to be taken literally—or at least as literally as a neo-Platonic Christianity can be taken) in order to incorporate them into my fundamentally Mormon worldview. Kushner, I propose, faces the same challenge incorporating Mormon motifs into what Evenden identifies as a probably agnostic worldview (59).

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Theology for the Approaching Millennium: *Angels in America*, Activism, and the American Religion

Michael Austin

I

Since its New York debut three years ago, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*—the most sustained treatment of Mormonism to play on the Broadway stage since Jerome Kern's *The Girl from Utah* in 1914—has earned a Pulitzer Prize, a room full of Tony Awards, the earnest praise of New York drama critics, and, not least of all, several surprisingly even-handed responses from Latter-day Saint scholars of literature. After reading David Pace's lavish praise for *Angels* in his review for *Dialogue*, Michael Evenden's even-handed appraisal of it in *Sunstone*, and the balanced reviews of the play's Salt Lake opening by nearly every theater critic in the state of Utah, a neutral observer might have some difficulty believing that Mormons are the closed-minded, hypocritical people portrayed in Kushner's play. All told, I think it is fair to say that the Mormon intellectual community has been far more generous to Kushner's play about neurotic, unfulfilled Mormons whose salvation depends on their acceptance of a gay worldview than Tony Kushner himself would be to a Mormon-authored play about neurotic, unfulfilled homosexuals who convert to Mormonism and discover eternal bliss.

My intention here, however, is neither to attack nor defend the play's portrayal of Mormons. I do not share the belief that Kushner wrote *Angels in America* to ridicule or insult Mormons, but neither do I think that he shows us anything like deference or respect. I do believe, however, that Mormonism in the play is a much deeper and more pervasive element than most audiences recognize, principally because it exists on three very distinct interpretive levels: the literal, the allegorical, and the theological. On the literal level, *Angels in America* is "about" Mormons because three of the eight major characters in the play are members of the LDS Church: Joe Pitt, a closeted homosexual and ultra-conservative

law clerk; Harper, his neurotic, pill-popping, but surprisingly sharp-witted wife; and Hannah, his initially closed-minded mother who becomes the only Mormon character allowed in the play's closing community of the redeemed. But Kushner's portrayal of Mormonism goes far beyond his use of openly Mormon characters: the entire concept of an angelic visitation to an American prophet is directly appropriated from Mormon sacred history. Kushner himself has called the Angel Moroni "the prototypical American Angel" and has stated that the very title of the play *Angels in America* required that it be about Mormons ("Tony," 102). Prior's vision of the angel incorporates many of the elements that Joseph Smith made famous into a direct allegorical representation: a buried book, peep stones, a prophetic calling, and a charge to spread a new gospel to the ends of the earth. Even the language surrounding the angel's visit borrows from the Mormon vernacular with phrases such as "truth restored" (*Millennium* 26), "a marvelous work and a wonder" (*Millennium* 62), and "Prophet. Seer. [and] Revelator" (*Millennium* 88).

Much remains to be said about both the literal and the allegorical uses of Mormonism in *Angels in America*; my primary focus here, however, is on the third, and in my opinion the most important, of the three levels: the theological. I argue first that *Angels in America* attempts to construct a theological framework for political activism—one that puts a nontraditional spin on some very traditional theological problems, such as humanity's relationship to God, God's relationship to history, and the problem of agency. Second, I argue that many of Kushner's theological positions are recognizably Mormon in their basic assumptions. Kushner's attempt to reimagine the foundations of traditional Christian and normative Jewish spirituality has brought him far closer to the revolutionary visions and writings of

Joseph Smith than he or anybody else has ever acknowledged.

II

Any exploration of Mormon theology in *Angels in America* must begin with Harold Bloom, the dynamic American literary critic whom Kushner has repeatedly credited as a driving force behind his work. In the introduction to *Perestroika*, Kushner acknowledges his debt to both Bloom's *Book of J* and his introduction to Olivier D'Allones's *Musical Variations on Jewish Thought*. In the afterword to the same play, he mentions Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*; and in an interview with *American Theatre* magazine, he specifically cites Bloom's *The American Religion* as one of the sources for his ideas about spirituality and community ("Tony," 26). Kushner's appropriation of Bloom's work has been so great, he reports, that, upon being invited to meet the great scholar, he "fled from the encounter as one of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* tribesmen might flee from a meeting with [the] primal father" (*Perestroika*, 158). Significantly, Bloom's *The American Religion*, which Kushner has cited as an influence on his writing, also contains one of the most daring and sympathetic readings of Mormon theology ever attempted by a non-Mormon scholar.

Bloom's focus throughout *The American Religion* is on a uniquely American spirituality that differs from its European counterpart along exactly the same lines that the early American republic differed from the monarchies of the Old World. In the European religion, Bloom argues, God is the ultimate aristocrat: an all-powerful monarch who rules absolutely and who is essentially superior to his depraved subjects. What the American religion attempts to do, then, is "to bring about in the spiritual realm what the American Revolution . . . inaugurated in the sociopolitical world" (105) by democratizing the relationship between humanity and divinity. Bloom's American religion cannot be mapped onto any single denomination; it is, rather, a set of theological tenets that are spread across the entire spectrum of religious worship in America. However, America's most successful indigenous religion has earned Bloom's special notice. "If there is already in place any authentic version of the American religion," he argues, "then . . . it must be the Mormons, whose

future as yet may prove decisive for the nation" (97).

While Bloom's analysis of Mormon history and doctrine is necessarily selective, his analysis of Mormonism and of the "authentic religious genius" Joseph Smith (97), is one of the most compelling misreadings of Latter-day Saint theology ever offered. In the three chapters that Bloom devotes to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, he expounds on a number of Mormon doctrines—and an even larger number of speculative propositions by early Mormon leaders—that, in his opinion, make Mormonism quintessentially American. Four of the doctrines he mentions bear directly on my argument:

1. That God is not a being of pure consciousness and infinite space, but a corporeal, material being who is subject to time, space, and passions (101).

2. That "God organized us and our world, but did not create either, since we are as early and original as he is" (101). This means that some part of the human soul, "what is best and oldest in us, goes back well before the creation" (103).

3. That God has not always been God, but that he "began as a man" and "earned Godhood through his own efforts" (111).

4. That human beings themselves are not locked into a role of eternal subservience. Just as God evolved from something human, so too can humans evolve to godhood themselves (111).

The ultimate implication of these four doctrines, as Bloom rightly interprets them, is a version of the cosmos in which "God and man . . . differ only in degree, not in kind" (105). And with this belief comes a necessarily democratized conception of the relationship between the human and the divine. Rather than waiting for their marching orders and obeying them without question, American religionists actively seek revelation from God; and when they disagree with the divine will, they feel free to question, lobby, pester, and beg God until he changes his mind.

The overt image of divinity in *Angels in America* seems to have been very much influenced by Bloom's notion that, in the American religion, the distance between the human and the divine is minimal. The angels in heaven are described as "incredibly powerful bureaucrats" who "can do anything but they can't invent, create" (*Perestroika*, 49), directly echoing

Bloom's contention that "the Mormon God can organize, but he cannot create" (115). The materiality of the angels is emphasized throughout the play—often in ways guaranteed to make contemporary Mormons blush—and when Prior decides to reject his prophetic calling, Kushner has him physically wrestle with the angel in ways that invoke both biblical and Book of Mormon precedents. On the advice of Hannah, the Mormon woman who has become Prior's spiritual advisor, Prior approaches the angel, bests him in a wrestling match, and directly quotes Jacob's line from Genesis 32:26: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (*Perestroika*, 119). Unknown to Prior, his actions also duplicate the actions of one of the patriarchs in the Book of Mormon: the prophet Enos, who had what he describes as a "wrestle" before God in which he "kneeled down before [his] maker and cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication" for an entire day and night. After this wrestle, the Lord tells Enos, "I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith." Enos then extracts God's promise that he will never allow the Lamanite people to disappear from the earth (Enos 1:4-13).

Despite their obvious differences, the stories of Jacob, Enos, and Prior Walter all follow the same structural lines: a prophet approaches a divine being, engages in a struggle that is described as a "wrestle," and receives a blessing for his efforts. This metaphor of wrestling with the divine, I believe, forms an important part of Kushner's theological project in *Angels in America*: the play itself is, among other things, a struggle with God over the question of AIDS. During the Episcopal National Day of Prayer for AIDS on 9 October 1994, Kushner delivered a lengthy prayer at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City. Throughout the prayer, which was later published in his *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness*, Kushner repeatedly calls God's attention to the suffering that AIDS and other problems have caused in the world:

Must grace fall so unevenly on the earth? Must goodness precipitate from sky to ground so infrequently? We are parched for goodness, we perish for lack of lively rain; there's a drought for want of grace, everywhere. Surely this has not escaped your notice? All life hesitates

now, wondering: in the night which has descended, in the dry endless night that's fallen instead of the expected rain: Where are you? (220)

Compare this excerpt to a remarkably similar prayer offered 155 years earlier by Joseph Smith, who was suffering unjust imprisonment in the Liberty Jail while his people were being expelled from the state of Missouri under threat of extermination:

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

How long shall thy hand be strayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?

Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion toward them? (D&C 121:1-3)

In these prayers, both Joseph Smith and Tony Kushner are, in their own way, wrestling with God on behalf of their people. That they conceive of a God who can be wrestled with sets them apart from both traditional Christianity and normative Judaism—but not from the American religion. In the European religion, suffering is something that should be borne, as Job bore it, with deference and resignation; in the American religion of Joseph Smith and Tony Kushner, human suffering is something that should be called to God's attention in an attempt to secure a response.

III

Kushner's theology of history, particularly the theological history of the occasionally Marxist Jewish mystic Walter Benjamin, also has distinctively Mormon assumptions. Kushner has cited Benjamin's *Understanding Brecht* as the book that propelled him into career in the theater, and he credits Benjamin's landmark essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" as one of the most important sources for the ideas in *Angels in America* ("Tony," 23, 26). So great is Benjamin's influence on the play that the name of its most important character, Prior Walter is, according to Kushner, a Benjaminian pun: the "prior" Walter is none other than Walter Benjamin ("Tony," 26).

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin flatly rejects the traditional Marxist/Hegelian position that history inexorably progresses toward a desired end. Instead, Benjamin argues, history is a random collection of catastrophes. He asserts that "whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate" (256) and that those who have benefitted from these actions have carefully constructed the twin myths of progress and historical determinism to conceal the consequences of their ascendancy. The most memorable image that Benjamin uses to illustrate his conception of history is Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. It is this angel that, as much as the Angel Moroni, serves as the forerunner of Prior's divine visitor in *Angels in America*:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling up wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is called progress. (257-58)

For Benjamin, then, history is nothing more than a movement from wreck to wreck, with progress, utopia, or paradise nowhere to be found. This catastrophe is written into history in much the same way that progress is written into the Hegelian version of the script; it is an inevitable part of historical existence. There is no salvation *within* history, only salvation *from* history—a salvation that will require a Messianic rupture of the fabric of the historical continuum itself.

The first part of the play, *Millennium Approaches*, promises precisely this kind of rupture. Immediately before the Angel crashes through the ceiling, Ethel Rosenberg tells Roy Cohn that "history is about to crack wide open" (*Millennium*, 114). When this divine messenger finally arrives, we discover that her philosophy bears more than a little resemblance to Benjamin's theory of catastrophic history. In her exhortation to Prior, she issues the following anti-

progress Jeremiad to the human race:

Forsake the Open Road:
Neither Mix nor Intermarry: Let Deep Roots Grow:
If you do not MINGLE you will cease to Progress:
Seek not to Fathom the World and its Delicate Particle
Logic.
You cannot Understand, you can only Destroy,
You do not Advance, you only Trample.
Poor blind Children, abandoned on the Earth,
Groping terrified, misguided, over
Fields of Slaughter, over bodies of the Slain:
HOBBLE YOURSELVES! (*Perestroika*, 52-53)

The initial promise of Messianic rupture, however, stands unfulfilled at the end of *Perestroika*. Kushner admits to having learned a great lesson from Benjamin: that "the most dangerous thing is to become set upon some notion of the future that isn't rooted in the most bleakest, most terrifying idea of what's piled up behind you" ("Tony," 25). Benjamin warns that progress always comes at a great cost, and Kushner takes that warning to heart; however, he is ultimately both too traditional and too postmodern to accept Benjamin's apocalyptic conclusions. As a traditional liberal, Kushner still clings to the notion that human beings can improve the world if they try hard enough; and as a committed postmodernist, he cannot possibly reconcile himself to the existence of an ahistorical space from which history could be assaulted. Prior implies both of these positions when, in rejecting his prophetic calling, he states, "We can't just stop. We're not rocks—progress, migration, motion is . . . modernity. It's animate, it's what living things do" (*Perestroika*, 132). The final blessing that Prior asks for and receives is "more life," which could just as easily be translated "more history," or more time to live, learn, and attempt to solve his own problems on his own terms—which is precisely the blessing that Kushner asks God for at the end of his prayer at St. John's Cathedral: "at least give us time to accomplish the future" (*Thinking About*, 223-24).

Mormonism fits into this convoluted Marxist theory through the conspicuously Mormon motif of migration. The name of the book that the angel gives Prior is "The Book of the Anti-Migratory Epistle" (*Perestroika*, 120); for her, as for all of the angels, the human impulse to migrate is at the root of our disastrous forward motion (*Perestroika*, 49).

This emphasis on migration creates an immediate, recognizable opposition to Mormonism, for which "migration" is perhaps *the* key historical term. The Mormon trek across the plains is quite possibly the best-known example of migration in American history—and Kushner has gone to great lengths to reproduce the pioneer experience in his play in the form of talking mannequins in the LDS visitors center. One of these living mannequins, the Mormon mother, comes to life and comforts Harper after Joe declares his homosexuality and leaves her. In response to the question, "How do people change?" the Mormon mother responds with one of the most profound philosophical observations found anywhere in the play:

God splits the skin with a jagged thumbnail from throat to belly and then plunges a huge filthy hand in, he grabs hold of your bloody tubes and they slip to evade his grasp but he squeezes hard, he insists, he pulls and pulls till all your innards are yanked out and the pain! We can't even talk about that. And then he stuffs them back, dirty, tangled and torn. It's up to you to do the stitching. (*Perestroika*, 79)

Kushner has stated that the second part of *Angels in America* "is a play about the difficulties of change" ("Thinking," 59), and nowhere are these difficulties better stated than in this brief speech by a homespun pioneer woman. The Mormon mother's view of personal change, I believe, directly equates with the author's view of historical progress: society can change, but only with a great deal of suffering; and as much as we may need to progress, we cannot ignore the consequences of our forward motion. With these sentiments, Kushner proposes a theology of history that avoids the shortcomings of both of the other systems presented in the play. The principal problem with the Hegelian model of history is that it ignores the human suffering that occurs in the name of progress; the principal problem with the Benjaminian model is that it does not allow for any real progress no matter how much one may struggle. Forward motion, Kushner seems to suggest, is possible, but not easy, and real progress requires that we keep one eye always on the possibility of a better future and the other firmly fixed upon the catastrophic wreckage of the past. Utopia is not cheap.

IV

The final theological issue I would like to consider is the question of free agency, which has always been an important element in the Mormon religion. Both the theology of "wrestling with God" and a theology of ambiguous progress in history bear directly upon the question of agency. If every aspect of the human consciousness was created by God, then there can be no such thing as free agency, since our ability to react in any situation would necessarily be determined in advance completely by our creator. Similarly, if history marches inexorably toward a predestined conclusion, then agency cannot be meaningful, since nothing we do can alter the predestined course. In constructing a theology that rejects both of these common premises, Kushner lays the foundation for a meaningful concept of human agency.

Acceptance of free agency also tends to separate the heroes of *Angels in America* from its villains. Nearly every character who commits what the play presents as a sin attempts to deny responsibility for that sin by placing the blame on some version of historical determinism, by, in other words, denying their own agency. When Louis first contemplates leaving Prior, he claims that he must leave because his "Neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress toward happiness or perfection . . . can't incorporate . . . sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go" (*Millennium*, 25). Joe announces that he is going to leave Harper in these terms: "My whole life has conspired to bring me to this place, and I can't despise my whole life" (*Millennium*, 78). When Joe tries to convince Louis that leaving Prior was not a sin, he says, "The rhythm of history is conservative. . . . You must accept that. And accept what is rightfully yours" (*Perestroika*, 35). And even Roy Cohn, the most despicable person in the play, justifies his greed and corruption by sneering, "I am not moved by the unequal distribution of goods on this earth. It's history, I didn't write it" (*Perestroika*, 60).

But Kushner will not countenance such evasions. In the theology advanced by *Angels in America*, we cannot blame history, creation, fate, or destiny for the way we are; when we sin we must acknowledge our accountability and accept the consequences. This is the essence of what Belize tells Louis after Louis deserts Prior:

I've thought about it for a very long time, and I still don't understand what love is. Justice is simple. Democracy is simple. Those things are unambivalent. But love is very hard. And it goes bad for you if you violate the law of love. (*Millennium*, 100)

This theme of accountability colors the play until its final scene. Prior ultimately refuses to accept Louis back, and Louis has to accept the consequences of having violated "the law of love"; Roy Cohn must pay for his sins throughout the play: he is tormented by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, the woman whom he had illegally executed in the fifties; and moments before he dies, she informs him that he has been disbarred for his legal misconduct. But it is Joe Pitt who must suffer the most severe consequences; after Louis discovers that Joe has written a number of ultra-conservative, anti-gay legal decisions for his employer, Louis viciously berates him, and Kushner abandons him to suffer for his sins. Though nearly every Mormon critic who has written about *Angels in America* has commented on the play's unfair demonization of Joe in the end, this treatment is necessary for Kushner to be true to a very Mormon principle: free agency implies moral accountability. In Kushner's eyes, Joe committed a grave sin by writing a legal decision that assaulted the rights of homosexuals; therefore, he must accept the consequences of his actions and pay for his sins. Fortunately for gay Mormon Republican lawyers everywhere, Kushner has already announced that Joe "will ultimately be redeemable in *Angels* part three" ("Tony," 103).

V

In summary, I hold that eight major theological propositions seem to form the core of Kushner's vision in *Angels in America*:

- Human beings have an indestructible essence that is coeternal with God.
- There is no essential difference in kind between humanity and divinity; what is best and oldest in us is already God (Bloom, 128).
- We have both the right and the responsibility to "wrestle with God" to influence him in our favor.
- If God is unable or unwilling to help us solve our social problems, we cannot wait; we must attempt to solve them ourselves.
- Migration, motion, and change, no matter how

well intentioned, can precipitate very real human suffering that must not be ignored.

- Historical progress is possible, but not guaranteed, because no script of history preexists to assure either inevitable progress or unavoidable catastrophe.
- Every human being has an agency that is not qualified by any deterministic view, of creation or history.
- We are accountable for how we use our agency and must suffer the consequences if we misuse it.

Two conclusions should be readily apparent from these propositions. First, Kushner is quite clearly laying a theological foundation for social activism. By emptying history of all teleological determinism, Kushner suggests that everything human beings do has genuine consequences; we cannot blame history for our failures, nor can we rely on it for our solutions. By elevating humanity to a divine status, he suggests that we have both the right and the responsibility to create solutions to our own problems. We can lobby, petition, pester, and wrestle with God, and hopefully we will eventually secure his intervention, but we cannot wait for him to act. But Kushner also warns that revolutionary action must be carefully thought out and acted on slowly, or it may lead to unexpected disaster. Aleskii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov, one of the principal characters in Kushner's play *Slavs*, seems to have been imported into the opening scene of *Perestroika* for the sole purpose of warning would-be revolutionaries against hasty, insufficiently theorized social change (*Perestroika*, 13-15).

The second conclusion that is evident from this core of Kushner's religious philosophy, as I have presented it, is that it contains a number of elements that are recognizably Mormon. This is not to say that Kushner's final religious conclusions are compatible with contemporary Mormonism; they most definitely are not. However, many of his theological premises—such as his beliefs about the materiality of God, the divinity of humankind, and the importance of free agency—are assumptions that owe their prominence in the American religious consciousness to Joseph Smith and his successors. To date, Tony Kushner's public statements about Mormonism have tended to be good-natured but condescending. Mormons may be "right-wing and horrible," but at

least "there's something dear and nice about them." And while he finds our faith "moving," he believes our cosmology to be "naive," "disingenuous," and "dumb" ("Tony," 102-3). But even though Tony Kushner the public speaker may have little respect for Mormon theology, Tony Kushner the author has not hesitated to appropriate numerous elements of that theology into the religious infrastructure of his play. *Angels in America* proves what Harold Bloom has already insisted: that "there is something of Joseph Smith's spirit in every manifestation of the American Religion" (127).

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Sea-Changed Iconography: Tony Kushner's Use and Abuse of Mormon Images and Traditions in *Angels in America*

Sandra Ballif Straubhaar

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* plays concern themselves extensively with Mormons and Mormonism. Three of the principal characters are Mormon, and incidental culture-specific allusions in the plays are perhaps one-quarter to one-third Mormon. Additional cultural strains in the plays involve Jewish, gay, and black American culture. The connections between Mormons and Reaganite politics and conservative social policies are also explored at some length. However, I intend to turn away, in my paper, from the small-scale Mormon-related references, and focus instead on Kushner's use of something larger, in the form of portions of the fundamental Mormon meta-narrative—specifically, the Joseph Smith story and the saga of the pioneers crossing the plains.

Perhaps the central focal character in *Angels in America* is Prior Walter, a young man of New England ancestry and no apparent previous religion, who is visited by a cataclysmic angel descending through his bedroom ceiling. This angelic visit can be seen within the framework of the play's narrative as either an utter delusion deriving from Prior's AIDS or as a phenomenon meant to be accepted as "real" on the same terms as any other happening in the play's already magical-realism-flavored universe¹—or possibly both at the same time.

It is clear that Kushner intends the figure of Prior Walter to be a kind of calque on the figure of the historical and/or mythical (hagiographical) Joseph Smith. Kushner himself says he has been intimately involved with all productions of these plays up to but not including the current [Winter 1995-96] Salt Lake City production (Melich); it is worth noting in this context that in the 1995 traveling version of the plays the actor chosen to play Prior's role, Robert

Sella, not only bore a remarkable resemblance, at least in profile, to the various historical Joseph Smith portraiture artifacts (portraits, possible photograph, death mask), but seemed even to have been coached to strike attitudes similar to Joseph's imagined ones as rendered in Mormon art, notably the Avard Fairbanks statue of the First Vision. (Bleached blond hair, however, rendered the perhaps-intended similarity imperfect.)

Such elusive echoes may be completely accidental; if they are purposeful, they indicate an immense amount of care lavished on details that will be lost on most of the audience in most cities—the portion of the audience not familiar with, and even baffled by, Mormons or Mormonism. My husband overheard the following intermission conversation last summer in Los Angeles: "I understand the Jewish stuff. I understand the gay stuff. But this Mormon stuff is so *weird!*" For us, today, the "Mormon stuff" should prove more accessible, however; I intend in this paper to look at it from several angles.

Parallels between Prior and Joseph Smith become more concrete in plot details. The Angel hails the terrified and passive-aggressive Prior with "Greetings, Prophet!" and (among other things) orders him to dig up the linoleum tiles under his kitchen sink. There he will find a sacred book written on pages of steel. With it are a pair of spectacles with opaque rock lenses (the Angel actually uses the term "peep-stones"), evocative both of early Mormon (granite) building materials and Prior's AIDS-related failing eyesight. The book, says the Angel, must come forth in the world, for its message is crucial at this point in time.

Prior's prophetic calling as portrayed in the play can be taken on several levels. Yes, he *is* a "true

prophet" within the framework of the narrative: often the insights he pronounces, accompanied by the phrase "threshold of revelation," are true. For instance, he tells Harper Pitt that her husband Joe is gay, which thing she has never before supposed (*Millennium*, 33). However, it is also worth noting that this insight occurs within a mutual simultaneous hallucination (or revelation) that both Prior and Harper are having. Within Kushner's narrated world, physical stimuli—AIDS, in Prior's case—lead to heightened states of consciousness that may be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, by the recipient as prophetic vision. Prior's ex-lover and nurse Belize dismisses Prior's visions as delusions born of illness (*Perestroika*, 55); Hannah Pitt, Harper's mother-in-law, tells Prior both that his visions are illness-induced *and* that they are genuine. Hannah compares Prior to Joseph Smith, who, as she sees it, willed real visions into being. "His desire made prayer. His prayer made an Angel. The Angel was real. I believe that" (*Perestroika*, 103).

Prior is not above using his prophetic station—real or delusional—to impress other people. Here he confronts his ex-lover Louis with his infidelity:

Prior [to Louis]: You're seeing someone else.

Louis (*Shocked*): What? No.

Prior: You are.

Louis: I'M NOT. Well, occasionally a . . . he's a . . . just a pickup, how do you . . .

Prior: Threshold of revelation. Now: Ask me how I know he's a Mormon.

(Pause. Louis stares.) (*Perestroika*, 84-85)

Later, when Prior makes a call on an utterly baffled Joe Pitt ("I want to meet my replacement," he tells Belize) and stammers out what he does not intend, he excuses himself by adding, "You misheard. I'm a Prophet . . . PROPHET PROPHET I PROPHECY I HAVE SIGHT I SEE. What do *you* do?" (*Perestroika*, 91).

Harper Pitt, the love-starved and agoraphobic Mormon housewife, is also a visionary and reality-bender, though she would never use the word "prophet" in self-reference. She tells Prior, in the hallucinatory scene cited earlier, "Deep inside you, there's a part of you, the most inner part, entirely free of disease. I can see that . . . Threshold of revelation" (*Millennium*, 34). Harper is almost as

deft a mystical manipulator of her own inner universe as Prior is, though she perceives herself as a failure in these endeavors because she has deviated from what she perceives as the Mormon standard type. When the constructed fantasy Antarctica she has sought refuge in vanishes around her, she remarks, "If I was a good Mormon I could have pulled it off" (*Perestroika*, 21). She tells Prior later that she is a "Jack Mormon. It means I'm flawed. Inferior Mormon product. Probably comes from jack rabbit, you know, I *ran*" (*Perestroika*, 64). Like Prior, Harper is nudged into a visionary state by physical stimuli—in her case, Valium.

Parallels between Prior Walter (or Harper Pitt, for that matter) and a Mormon-informed notion of prophethood do not go much further than the above-mentioned basic outlines, which, admittedly, already stray considerably from that notion. Kushner's narrated world draws in near-indiscriminate fashion on a variety of disparate sources; Mormon sources hardly constitute a majority among them. Other strains used in connection with Prior Walter's prophetic calling include cabalistic lore, as in the scene where Prior's two ancestors (Prior 1 and Prior 2) summon the Angel with cabalistic chants in Hebrew (*Millennium*, 88); or where Emily the nurse speaks Hebrew without being aware of it, and the mystic incarnation of Deity, the Aleph Glyph, suddenly appears on the wall (*Millennium*, 98-99). (Incidentally this scene, in the production I saw, was far scarier than the Angel itself. Whether this was Kushner's intent, I have no idea.) Nostradamus is invoked as an additional prophet-prototype, when the street woman asks Hannah: "Have you read the prophecies of Nostradamus? . . . Some guy I went out with once somewhere, Nostradamus. Prophet, outcast, eyes like . . ." (*Millennium*, 104).

Modern iconic imagery brought about through technology—film—becomes another quasi-religious thread in the tapestry. When the light and sound environment onstage presage the Angel's imminent corporeal appearance to Prior in the last scene of *Millennium Approaches*, it is not ancient religious imagery that the new prophet thinks of. What he bursts out with is, "God almighty. . . . Very Steven Spielberg" (*Millennium*, 118).

Prior Walter may be a *very* distant echo of Joseph Smith, but Kushner's Angel is farther away yet from

any traditional Mormon construction of Moroni, except for the fact that it is a heavenly messenger that confronts a prophet in his bedroom. It—Kushner's Angel is omni-gendered, although it is usually played by a woman—incorporates Marxist critic Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History," which is not exactly a figure bearing good tidings (*Perestroika*, 154). It is winged (unlike correlated Mormon angels), comparing itself to a bird of prey; it can be terrifying in one moment and laughable in the next; and it is erotic as well, producing sexual arousal in those mortals to whom it appears (*Millennium*, 113; *Perestroika*, 43-46, 48, 120). This coupling of religious and sexual ecstasy is an ancient one, found in most cultures and traditions, but it is not commonly made much of by twentieth-century Mormons.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, Kushner's new Angel deviates from the Mormon model in that it bears a *bogus message* in the new revealed book, a message that must be ultimately rejected. Within Kushner's narrated universe, the angels in Heaven, "a city much like San Francisco,"² have been abandoned by God since 1906, the year of the Great Earthquake (*Perestroika*, 50, 51), and counsel stasis, non-progress, and immobility as appropriate responses to the enigma that is modern existence. Prior must resign his prophetic mantle, and the other characters must recognize this angelic advice as folly, before the plays may conclude (*Perestroika*, 132-34).

The other sizeable cluster of Mormon-related topoi (themes or motifs) that Kushner draws on relate to the pioneer crossing. The venture of the Mormon pioneers into the unknown, which the play's audience (and some of its characters) see ludicrously, but also seriously, dramatized in a malfunctioning audio-animatronics exhibit in the Manhattan Visitors Center, prefigures two other waves of pioneer activity also celebrated in the plays. Riding the first of these waves are the Eastern European Jewish ancestors of the character Louis, Prior's sometime lover, who hears the rabbi say at his grandmother Sarah's funeral in the play's opening scene:

"You do not live in America. No such place exists. Your clay is the clay of some Litvak shtetl, your air is the air of the steppes—because she carried the old world on her back across the ocean, in a boat, and she put it down on Grand Concourse Avenue, or in Flatbush, and she worked

that earth into your bones, and you pass it to your children, this ancient, ancient culture and home. You can never make that crossing that she made, for such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist." (*Millennium*, 10)

Riding the second wave, Louis tells Joe Pitt later, are late-twentieth-century North American openly gay men: "Exploration. Across an unmapped terrain . . . Like your ancestors . . . And many have perished on the trail" (*Perestroika*, 72). Pioneering of any of these three kinds involves internal turmoil and is not meant to be seen as easy, as the Mormon mother figure, who escapes from the diorama machinery to go walking with Harper in Brooklyn, informs the audience:

Harper: Was it a hard thing, crossing the prairies?

Mormon Mother: You ain't stupid. So don't ask stupid. Ask something for real.

Harper (*A beat, then*): In your experience of the world. How do people change?

Mormon Mother: Well it has something to do with God so it's not very nice. God splits the skin with a jagged thumbnail from throat to belly and then plunges a huge filthy hand in, he grabs hold of your bloody tubes and they slip to evade his grasp but he squeezes hard, he *insists*, he pulls and pulls till all your innards are yanked out and the pain! We can't even talk about that. And then he stuffs them back, dirty, tangled and torn. It's up to you to do the stitching.

Harper: And then get up. And walk around. (*Perestroika*, 79)

It is this conversation which later gives Harper the courage to make her own pioneering move, to leave behind Joe, her Valium, and their Brooklyn apartment and take a plane West, echoing the original Mormon pioneer trajectory.

I found the scene in which Prior and Harper, now meeting in person instead of via mutual hallucination, watch the pioneer exhibit in the Manhattan Visitors Center to be the funniest in the plays. The techniques of audio-animatronics and semi-automated figures (projected screen heads) must be intended by both Disney executives and LDS Church public relations people to impress and awe the viewer, or they would not employ them so often. But, as the recent book *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* corroborates as well (to my

relief), there are many people besides myself and Tony Kushner who find such displays vulgar or funny or even frightening (see esp. chapters "Story Time," 79-97, and "The Alternative Ride," 163-79). Laughter can sometimes be the best medicine, and Kushner does laugh, by showing us the exhibit's mechanical shortcomings.

Voice: Welcome to the Mormon Visitor's Center Diorama Room. In a moment, our show will begin. We hope it will have a special message for you. Please refrain from smoking, and food and drink are not allowed. (*A chiming tone*) Welcome to the Mormon Visitor's . . .

(*The tape lurches into very high speed, then smears into incomprehensibly low speed, then stops, mid-message, with an unpromising metallic blat.*)

Harper: They're having trouble with the machinery.

(*She rips open a bag of nacho-flavored Doritos and offers them to Prior.*) (*Perestroika*, 63)

Ensuing complications in the audio-animatronics exhibit, which is intended to show a pioneer family on the trek (whose father is played by the actor playing Joe), include this intrusion of Louis into the diorama:

Louis (*Looking around*) [to Joe, in his pioneer outfit]: God you should get a bigger office, it's crowded in . . . I don't like cults.

Joe: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [sic] is not a cult.

Louis: Any religion that's not at least two thousand years old is a cult.

Prior: WHAT IS HE DOING IN THERE?

Joe (*Simultaneously*): Oh shut up, Louis.

Louis: And I know people who would call *that* generous.

Prior: WHAT IS HE. . .

Harper: Who? The little creep? He's in and out every day. I hate him. He's got absolutely nothing to do with the story. (*Perestroika*, 67)

Scenes such as this one have caused some audiences and readers, both Mormon and non-Mormon, to see the plays as promoting a kind of cheap-shot anti-Mormon sensibility,³ but I think this interpretation misunderstands Kushner, who includes at least as many (and probably more) jokes at the expense of Jews and gays, and clearly does honor the Mormon pioneer achievement.

The one recurring element in the plays where I

find that Kushner achieves genuine offensiveness for a Mormon audience (and I know Mike Austin agrees with me in this)⁴ is the display of temple garments onstage, particularly in the scene where Joe strips his off to show Louis how willing he is to abandon his past. In the production I saw, the actor used the old-fashioned buttoned sort, and buttons flew across the stage, causing me to wonder about the hapless wardrobe mistress who would have the task of sewing a new set of buttons every day back on to what must be to her *very* strange underwear. Kushner's intent in appropriating Mormon garments, I would like to think, is to show an easy signifier of ethnicity, like Amish bonnets or Navajo jewelry. One could imagine an analogous scene in which a Catholic threw a rosary into the sea or a Buddhist cast a prayer wheel down a well. What external Mormon symbols are available to be stripped away, after all? one can imagine Kushner thinking. (I don't expect he knows about CTR rings.) But by including not external things, but actual temple garments, on stage—hidden signifiers rather than open ones—he offends deeply.

Some Mormons would take, and have taken, offense at Kushner's use of Mormon icons such as Joseph Smith and the pioneers. Since Mormons tend to have unique and exclusive claims to ultimate truth, it can seem a mockery if an artist alters or adulterates the sacred histories and images associated with that truth.⁵ When I was about eleven years old, I came across a vignette in *Mad* magazine that was a clear parody of Joseph Smith: skeptical police officers, as I recall, were interviewing a modern teenager named "Joseph Polodny, Junior," dressed James-Dean-style but with definite Joseph Smith facial features, about some cockamamie vision that he had claimed to have had—and all this was a throw-away scene embedded in a story otherwise unrelated to Mormonism. (I hope I remember this something like correctly.)⁶ I took great offense at this—surely more than was meant by the authors of the piece. Kushner, whose point in his plays is to show the failure of old theory, the failure of old narrative, the failure of ultimate-truth claims in our postmodern times, would not be likely to have much sympathy for objections like mine at that time. See, for example, the speech he has put in the mouth of the "World's Oldest Living Bolshevik" (*Perestroika*, 13-14).

In contrast to postmodernists like Kushner, many Mormons by and large like our truth literal, linear, couched in an unchanging narrative, without tampering; for instance, when Ivy League literary critic Harold Bloom called religion (and specifically Mormonism) "spilled poetry," it is not surprising when some find such a term vile and insulting.⁷ A truth narrative cannot be retold in poetry or changed in any other way, such Mormons would claim: it would cease to have any truth in it.

However, it is just as clear that not all Mormons think this way. Otherwise my undergraduate BYU professors would not have delighted so much in having us seek for types of Christ in the great literature of the non-Mormon western world; no one ever thought for a moment on such occasions that the existence of these types diminished the original. We would not have been as likely to find types of Joseph Smith in literature then, but now we can even do that—in Kushner—as this conference session demonstrates. In the postmodern now, even Mormon writers can employ oblique and only semi-recognizable versions of the Joseph Smith story and of the Book of Mormon narrative, as Orson Scott Card has done in his *Alvin Maker* and *Homecoming* series respectively. The existence of many diverse narratives both new and old, in the light of Kushner's notion of the failure of meta-narrative in our era, ought to be a cause in these postmodern times for rejoicing, rather than taking offense.

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NOTES

1. "The rules of reality in my play[s] are somewhat slippery," says Kushner. As qtd. by Melich, E-3, E-3.

2. San Francisco is presumably selected because of its long-standing status of a century or more as a haven for homosexuals, and because of the cataclysm in its past, which can then have an analogue in Kushner's Heaven.

3. "It's a shame, IMHO [in my humble opinion], that this work is considered important. . . . Most Mormons would rather ignore it than speak out and condemn the blatant anti-Mormonism it displays." Rex Goode, AML-List@cc.weber.edu, 19 Sept. 1995. "His 'take' on Mormonism was not designed to be insightful—it was designed to be spiteful." John Hansen, AML-List@cc.weber.edu, 3 Oct. 1995; used by permission. "The anti-Mormonism is an easy shot." Gerald Nachman, "On the State of Doom, Charm and Portermania," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 June 1991.

4. "Kushner should have been aware that this symbol [temple garments] is something that Mormons consider extremely sacred, and the act of displaying it on stage is, independent of context, a slap in the face. If he had exposed, say, sacred Native American symbols to open ridicule, I think that there would have been a huge outcry among liberal academics. For me, any desecration of sacred religious symbols—anybody's—shows a disrespect that should not be allowed to go uncriticized." Mike Austin, AML-List@cc.weber.edu, 6 Dec. 1995; used by permission.

5. One correspondent to the AML-List has even maintained that since Kushner has told (a version of) the Joseph Smith story so compellingly on stage, he has effectively usurped any future opportunities of faithful Mormons to tell the straight story on stage for the general public. Thom Duncan, "Angry About Angels," AML-List@cc.weber.edu, 11 Dec. 1995.

6. A recent attempted visit to Special Collections at the UCLA Library, where this issue should be housed, proved abortive because of unannounced holiday closing hours. I intend to track it down soon to verify my memories, though.

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Through a Glass Darkly: Mormons as Perceived by Critics' Reviews of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*

Daniel Stout, Joseph D. Straubhaar, and Gail Andersen Newbold

Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is expanding rapidly (Stark, 1994; Heaton, 1992). As the Church approaches the ten million member milestone, social science researchers have raised a number of important questions about the rapid growth of Mormonism. Issues include changing Mormon demographics (Heaton, Goodman, and Holman, 1994; Goodman and Heaton, 1986), cultural tensions of Church globalization (Young, 1994), and the conflicts of Mormon identity and assimilation (Mauss, 1994). Another topic of research focuses on mass media use and the role this might play in the ways Mormons assimilate in the larger society (Stout; Valenti and Stout). What has not been examined, however, are the ways in which mass media such as movies, television, newspapers, and magazines tend to describe Mormons.

How religious groups are received by the larger society has much to do with the kinds of information available to citizens. Although messages about Latter-day Saints are disseminated through mass media, little is known about what is specifically said and what kinds of media professionals are involved. New research on this issue, however, could expand knowledge about the ways in which mass media help create the information environments out of which individuals form impressions or make judgments about various religious denominations.

Scott Abbott argues that Mormon assimilation may be frustrated by recent works of popular literature and drama that depict Latter-day Saints as "narrow" and "bigoted." He offers, as examples, John Gardner's novel *Mickelson's Ghost*, Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, John Le Carre's *The Russia House*, and Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*. For example, Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Angels in Am-*

America, refers to Salt Lake City as a place of "abundant energy; not much intelligence." Abbott fears that these descriptions could make Mormons vulnerable to future stereotyping and make assimilation an arduous process.

Abbott focuses on literature with admittedly small, elite audiences. If such literary portrayals are to have an impact on mass audiences, other media actors, such as newspaper critics, must help disseminate elements of literary portrayal through mass media, such as newspapers, to larger audiences. That is, how such literary characterizations as depictions of Mormons in *Angels in America* diffuse into the larger society has much to do with how media organizations filter information through critics, editors, and marketing managers before it is finally conveyed to the public. These individuals are what Kurt Lewin termed "gatekeepers," who control, shape, and expand information as it flows from one source to another. This paper seeks to learn more about what information gatekeepers in the media communicate about Mormons as well as what they discard. This paper thus seeks to expand our knowledge about mass media as filters of information related to religious groups as they experience the process of cultural integration.

ANGELS IN AMERICA: A CASE STUDY

To learn more about how media organizations filter information about religious groups, we examine newspaper reviews summarizing the depictions of Mormons in Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*. Considered by some to be the major or at least most visible work of the decade involving Mormons, *Angels* received both a Pulitzer Prize and two Tony Awards, one for Best Play of 1993 (Part I) and the

second for Best Play of 1994 (Part II). Set primarily in New York City, it dramatizes the complex interplay between religion, politics, and the AIDS crisis. Although it has a number of themes and subplots, the work revolves chiefly around Prior Walter, a non-Mormon homosexual with AIDS who interacts with three other main characters who are Mormon. At a more general level, the play is about the consequences of the rise of conservative politics and the perceived inability of American religious institutions to offer guidance to society. Kushner particularly critiques society's failure to embrace the homosexual community in a time of crisis brought about by the AIDS epidemic.

To say that the main goal of *Angels* is to criticize Mormon theology would not be accurate. Kushner himself asserts that "Mormonism is treated with respect and dignity" (qtd. in Melich, E-3). Yet as Abbott observes, some scenes in the play, particularly if taken out of context, could evoke stereotypical notions of Mormons as narrow, superficial, and exclusionary. For example, having heard that Mormons believe in angels, Prior Walter goes to the Mormon Visitors' Center in New York with some questions. There he strikes up a conversation with Harper Pitt, a Valium-addicted, agoraphobic Mormon whose husband, Joe, leaves her to pursue a homosexual affair with Louis Ironson, also a main character.

PRIOR: Do you believe in angels? In the angel Mormon?

HARPER: Moroni, not Mormon, the Angel Moroni. Ask my mother-in-law, when you leave, the scary lady at the reception desk, if its name was Moroni why don't they call themselves Morons. . . . (*Perestroika*, 64)

Later in the play, when Louis finds out that his new lover is a Mormon, he is incredulous:

LOUIS: But . . . a *Mormon*? You're a . . . a . . . a . . .

JOE: Mormon. Yes.

LOUIS: But you...*can't* be a Mormon! You're a lawyer! A *serious* lawyer! (*Perestroika*, 67)

The issue here is not so much whether these passages fully capture Kushner's depiction of Mormons in *Angels*. Nor does it matter whether viewers of the play "register Mormonism's presence . . . only as a

sort of fanciful local color . . ." (Evenden, 56). The fact is that hundreds of thousands will not see the play firsthand but will instead rely on the interpretations of critics in the mass media for summaries and opinions about the play and its significance. Which depictions of Mormons will critics emphasize in their reviews? Which will they discard? Given that hundreds of major newspapers in the United States have published reviews of *Angels*, such questions are important to those who study the degree to which mass media perpetuate stereotypical notions of particular religious groups—in this case, Mormons.

MEDIA GATEKEEPERS AND ASSIMILATION

This paper brings together the theoretical concept of *religious assimilation* and the mass communication phenomenon of *gatekeeping*. Because mass communication researchers and sociologists of religion work in separate fields, these two ideas have been studied in relative isolation with no clear bridge of understanding between them. To survive and flourish, all religious groups must be accommodated to some degree by the larger society. Media gatekeepers either facilitate or impede this process by providing the information upon which citizens make judgments about various religious groups. Simply stated, the religious organizations that align themselves most closely with the values and norms of the host society are more likely to receive support and become assimilated, while those whose worldview runs contrary to societal norms usually do not (see Mauss; Robbins; Stark, 1987; Young). Gatekeepers, whether they be movie critics, editors, journalists, or television program directors, help shape the information environments out of which millions engage in everyday conversations about Catholics, evangelicals, fundamentalists, mainline Protestants, Mormons, and other religious organizations.

Scholars and popular writers are divided on the question of how mass media aid the assimilation process. On the one hand, Wade Roof asserts that recent television programs, novels, and newspaper stories raise the credibility of mainstream religion by giving "serious attention to the spiritual and religious questions" (166). On the other hand, Michael Medved in his popular book *Hollywood vs. America* dedicates an entire chapter to how religion is trivialized and degraded in movies and television programs.

Similar claims are made by William Fore and Gregg Lewis.

Even though these authors raise some important questions, their work rarely amounts to more than personal speculation about the ability of some artistic works to undermine religious values. What is needed, however, is new research describing how these works are filtered through media decision makers and opinion leaders and passed on to audiences of even greater size. Two channels direct the information flow on religious groups. One is a direct experience of media or events, such as theatergoers' impressions of *Angels in America*. Another is the summaries and impressions that broad media audiences get from media reviews and news. Popular writers often restrict their attention to the actual audience of a movie, play, novel, or television program and forget that media gatekeepers, first, and then opinion leaders interpret the work for other individuals, many of whom do not experience it firsthand. Of this two-step flow of information, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld assert that "ideas often seem to flow" from mass media "to opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population" (32). In fact, this idea has been updated by Katz and others to be a multistep flow in which, for example, *New York Times* gatekeepers decide what they will feature, then television news producers use the *Times* to decide what is most newsworthy. The resulting television news reaches a mass audience, even though the *Times* does not.

In this case, Kushner creates images and characters about Mormons in a play. Critics decide whether to mention the Mormon characters and themes, which specific characters and themes to cover, and what treatment to give them. Opinion leaders interested in theater may read the reviews and then discuss them with a broader circle of friends, eventually leaving certain images of Mormons with a fairly broad audience. In this study we try to expand what is known about the types of themes and issues gatekeepers focus on when they interpret an artistic work that features a particular religious group, in this case Mormons.

Studies of "gatekeeping" focus primarily on why certain items gain entry to the mass media and why others are rejected. In a recent review of research, Dennis McQuail argues that several factors influence

the decisions of gatekeepers: (1) subjective and arbitrary judgments of writers and editors, (2) personal ideologies and opinions, including views of groups like Mormons, (3) organizational habits and routine, and (4) "news value," or the degree to which the item is perceived to be consistent with the dominant ideologies and values of the audience, and the degree to which something is perceived as likely to be interesting to the intended audience. These comprise patterns of what gatekeepers are likely to include or exclude. For example, even though Mormons are prominently featured in *Angels*, will they be as interesting to reviewers of the plays as gays or Jews, the other two main groups? Few, if any, researchers have studied the output of media gatekeepers as they interpret artistic works featuring members of particular religious denominations. We used the following general research questions to direct our study:

1. Is it possible to identify dominant themes and patterns in how Mormons are discussed in newspaper reviews of *Angels in America*?
2. If so, what are these themes and patterns?
3. How realistic are the fears of Abbott and other Mormon critics that critics tend to focus on negative images or themes about Mormons?

At a theoretical level, all three questions address the general issue of how information about religious groups is disseminated to the larger society. By doing so, the study gets beyond the casual and off-handed claims about how artistic works either help or hinder the assimilation process.

METHODS

We analyzed the texts of 368 reviews of *Angels in America* that had appeared in major U.S. newspapers and that were available on Lexis-Nexus. This method may have excluded reviews that appeared in some smaller papers. We also included two lengthy recent reviews of the Salt Lake production in the two main local papers, the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

As our theoretical perspective reflects, we argue that critics may function as gatekeepers for information about the plays to those who do not see them. Critics' comments about Mormons in the Kushner plays also may function as part of a process of image formation about Mormons for their readers.

The critics serve as a second step in a multistep flow of information about Mormons.

However, we realize that textual analysis, like content analysis, is very limited in its scope and generalizability. From the text, we really cannot say much about the intentions of the critics, their opinions about Mormons, or how the plays may have affected those opinions. We can only look at what they have published and what newspaper readers will read. We also cannot assume anything about the effects on the readers of reading these reviews.

We realize that media texts, like newspaper reviews of plays, have limited effects. Quantitative studies tend to emphasize the importance of the reader in selectively perceiving, remembering, and interpreting such texts (Blumler and Katz). Qualitative studies about active audiences also tend to underscore that readers are active and can agree with, negotiate, or reject meanings in such texts (Fiske; Morley). However, texts are part of the overall process of sense-making (Shields and Dervin). So as readers try to make sense of the world, including such relatively low salience tasks as figuring out who Mormons are, then the past or present reading of such texts may well affect their views in at least a modest way.

SALIENCE OF MORMONS

Perhaps the first and most obvious point is that most reviewers of *Angels in America* did not report anything about the Mormon themes in their reviews. Despite the salience of Mormon characters in three principal roles, only 68 of 370 reviews mentioned Mormons. It seems that Mormons are not on the cognitive maps of the reviewers, certainly not as much as gays or Jews, also prominent in the play.

This is a significant example of reviewers acting as gatekeepers. Most of them filtered out of their reviews the fact that Mormons were a significant part of the play. In their written texts, most reviewers removed an emphasis on Mormons that Kushner clearly intended from the beginning, as he has explained in several interviews, although the two Mormon women characters developed later.

Mr. Kushner told Mr. Eustis he wanted to write a play for five gay male characters, starring Roy Cohn, the Mormons and AIDS. They were sure the N.E.A. would

turn the project down. When, to everyone's amazement, they got the \$57,000 grant, Mr. Kushner realized that he had proposed a play with five gay men for a theater company consisting of three straight women and one straight man. "I just had to change the story," he remembers. "That's one of the reasons why the play wound up having eight characters. There's a tremendous amount of accident in all this and that's exciting. I had to write a part for an older actress, too, and the part of Hannah"—the Mormon mother of one of the main characters—"is only there because of that. She is tremendously important to the play and so is Harper, one of the other female parts." Harper, who is married to Hannah's son, "is one of the centers of the play." (Cheever, 2-7)

THEMES INVOLVING MORMONS

From the sixty-eight reviews that commented on the plays' Mormon characters and themes, it is possible to discuss how the critics acted as gatekeepers and intermediaries in the process of image formation.

The Need for Theories, Laws, and Rules

One of Kushner's larger themes seems to be that the approach of the new millennium shows the need for grand theories or religion to guide people. "One of the things the play is saying is that (religious) theory is incredibly important to us and that without it, we don't know where we are going," says Kushner in an interview (DeVries, 6). Most clearly, at the beginning of *Perestroika*, the Old Bolshevik character calls for theories to guide us, "not just market incentives" (14).

Most critics seem to like the fact that Kushner addresses such issues. Several critics see Mormonism portrayed positively as a religion with theories to offer, featured with Judaism and Marxism, even though Kushner doesn't necessarily agree with them. However, at least one critic thoroughly panned Kushner's handling of religion:

Most unsatisfying is Kushner's handling of religion. After divine interventions culminating in a trip to heaven by the dying Prior Walter (Stephen Spinella), we are told that angels and religions have nothing to say about life, only death and the hereafter. That is a rather small perception to serve on so expansive a platter, even for atheists and agnostics in the audience. The Los Angeles version (which Kushner labels "a mistake") made heaven feel more comically political and Cohn, the devil on earth, seem

more magically powerful. The revised *Perestroika* offers realism with less impact. Kushner even implies that Prior's fevered visions are dreams; he quotes Dorothy's words from the Wizard of Oz on returning to Kansas. Dreams are often sources of revelation in the Bible, but this retreat from the phantasmagorical to the everyday feels like a cheat. If Kushner means that spirituality is no substitute for clear morality and positive mental attitude, he shouldn't need the equivalent of a full working day to get that across. (Henry)

Other critics noted that religious institutions—in this case Mormonism (and Judaism and perhaps even Marxism as a quasi-religion)—have outlived their usefulness in today's world in Kushner's portrayal. They see him saying that religion has always provided important guidelines for people but that religions are not keeping up with the times. Kushner seems to agree, explaining in one interview: "I wanted to show characters struggling to maintain their belief systems, even as those systems were failing to serve them as useful maps" (qtd. in Evans, 26 March 1995, Viewpoint, 8). A number of critics agree that these guidelines are no longer relevant and that the people who continue to try to live by their rules are struggling unsuccessfully:

"Millennium" is a juicy adult-themed soap opera with national (and biblical and Talmudic) scope. In a chaotic, competitive, plague-riddled world, how do you do the right thing for yourself and for your fellow man? Laws of Judaism and Mormonism, laws of the government, laws of realpolitik (where there are no laws, only winners and losers), and the laws of love are all at issue. In a panic, the characters flounder for guidance and flout the laws. (Pressley)

"One of the things the play is saying is that (religious) theory is incredibly important to us and that without it, we don't know where we are going," says Kushner. "On the other hand, as systematic approaches to ethics age, get passed up by history, the rules and laws which they had laid down become irrelevant and impossible and we distort ourselves terribly trying to adhere to those beliefs. It is a life and death matter to hang onto your beliefs, but it can also be a life and death matter to know when it's time to say they aren't working anymore."

Indeed, one of the play's main themes—played out as dialectic between Judaism and Mormonism—is an examination "of how theoretical religion exists in a pluralistic society," as one character puts it in "Perestroika." (De Vries)

Mormon Iconography in U.S. History

Kushner seems to consider both Mormon history and Mormon iconography, or religious symbols, as major aspects of American culture. He gives both prominent space within the play. As Sandra Straubhaar's paper reflects, Kushner uses Mormon iconography, such as angels, buried prophetic books, stone spectacles for translating, and the migration west, even though he repositions them for his own symbolic ends.

The general feeling we gathered from the critics' reviews is that Mormons were a brave, admirable, and courageous people historically, due to the early pioneers' perilous trek across the country in search of religious freedom. Mormon history and theology are seen as mythic. Yet the play juxtaposes Joseph Smith to the McCarthy hearings and *The Wizard of Oz*, a juxtaposition that makes many Mormons uncomfortable.

It also appears that several critics see Mormon themes as aspects of American popular culture rather than as a unique religious message. The use of words such as "mythology" may make Mormon readers of such criticism feel that, while critics see the early pioneers as people to be admired, the beliefs that drove them West are so much fiction:

And then, even more dazzlingly, come the answers, delivered in three and a half hours of spellbinding theater embracing such diverse and compelling native legends as the Army-McCarthy hearings, the Mormon iconography of Joseph Smith and the MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Prior's searching pilgrimage is echoed throughout *Perestroika* by the Mormon, Jewish and black characters and implicitly by their pioneer, immigrant and enslaved ancestors. As Prior journeys to heaven, so the Mormon mannequins in a wagon-train diorama come magically to life; Belize is possessed by the ghosts of Abolitionist days while Louis must wrestle with his discarded Jewishness. (Rich, Nov. 1993)

This is play writing with a grand design, sometimes written to excess in its wisecracks and philosophizing, but always with an effort to provide historical perspective and political punch to its narrative. In tracing the heritage and odysseys of gays and straights, Jews and Mormons, founding fathers and immigrants, Kushner bridges centuries and cultures for his 20th century epic, and in so doing he constructs a form and creates a content that in its aspirations

and achievements is rare in American drama. (Christian-
sen, 1993)

But even as Mr. Kushner portrays an America of lies and cowardice to match Cohn's cynical view, he envisions another America of truth and beauty, the paradise imagined by both his Jewish and Mormon characters' ancestors as they made their crossing to the new land. (Rich, May 1993)

This two-part, seven-hour "gay Fantasia" explores the AIDS crisis, Mormon mythology, and the late sleazy super-lawyer Roy Cohn—with plenty of Ronald Reagan/George Bush bashing along the way. (Stearns)

He is the ideal heroic vessel for Mr. Kushner's unifying historical analogy, in which the modern march of gay people out of the closet is likened to the courageous migrations of turn-of-the-century Jews to America and of 19th-century Mormons across the plains. (Rich, Nov. 1992)

Director Declan Donnellan proves as adept at integrating the play's oddball styles as he was in *Millennium Approaches*, which is revived, somewhat recast, in tandem with this new production. When it comes to clarifying its meaning, he is understandably less successful. For instance, we are presumably supposed to contrast the angel who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1830, and sent him and his Mormon followers bravely across the American wilderness, with the angel who appears here in black describing herself as a bird of prey. Each of them, we are told, is a "belief with wings and arms that can carry you." But the demands the newer of the two is making on Prior remain inscrutable. (Night-
ingale 1993)

Kushner has said that the story of Joseph Smith's revelation and the Mormon migration west "may be the greatest American story ever told." (Melich)

The Angel Moroni led Joseph Smith to the Hill Cumorah, the burial site of the plates on which the Book of Mormon was inscribed. Smith unearthed, along with the plates, "bronze bows" with stones set in them. These I take to have been Bible-era spectacles with rocks for lenses, the Urim and the Thummim. Before he became a prophet, Smith was known in upstate New York for his ability to locate buried treasure with use of "peep-stones." These stones assisted him, as they assist Prior in *Perestroika*, in the act of translating ancient writings. (Kushner)

Mormon-Jewish Similarities

A few of the critics tend to reflect Kushner's and

the plays' view of Mormonism as a home-grown American religion, the counterpart to Judaism, the other major religion discussed in the play. Mormonism can thus be respected for its place in America's history and as a major current force:

Along with its many historic and pop-culture references, (Prior quotes from films such as *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Wizard of Oz*), *Angels* is colored by Judaism and Mormonism. The Jewish and Yiddish influences come from Kushner's Jewish-Lithuanian ancestry. But Kushner also wanted to depict the influences of a home-grown American religion—hence the presence of Mormon figures such as Joe Pitt and his mother, Hannah. (E. Evans, March 1995)

The Mormons I've met have been both right wing and good-hearted, and that, in my experience, is an unusual combination. Mormonism is America's home-grown religion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day [sic] Saints is notoriously homophobic, as bad in that regard as the Roman Catholic Church. But I do find other aspects of Mormon theology appealing. You're judged by your deeds rather than by your intentions. That's something Mormonism and Judaism share: you have to do good to be good. (The scene above is in the diorama room of the Mormon visitors' center in the play.) . . .

Hebrew is a language of great antiquity and mystery, and of great compression. Each letter, each word encompasses innumerable meanings, good and evil. The physical letters are themselves totems, objects of power. The Torah, the Book, is to be treated with veneration. Here is another Mormon-Jewish connection: both are People of the Book—only very different books. The aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the seed word, the God letter. This is why, in the play, God is referred to by the Angel as "the Aleph Glyph." The real name of God is, of course, unutterable. (Kushner)

Mormons in the Reagan Era

Critics note that Kushner seems to use Mormons as a key to and as representative of the 1980s, along with AIDS, the fall of Communism, Roy Cohn-style conservatism, and crisis in social institutions like marriage (as characterized by the Mormon couple, Harper and Joe). Another issue identified with the Reaganite 1980s is the rise of conservative religion and its power in politics. Even though Mormons are not as visible politically as groups such as the Christian Coalition, the critics seem to agree that Mormons fit that image.

The critics also pick up on the use of Joe Pitt to reflect the contradictions between political conservatism and personal morality crises, as Joe begins to come out of the closet:

When Kushner, now 35, received a commission to write a play five years ago from the small Eureka Theatre in San Francisco, he noted that he wanted to explore three matters in his drama: AIDS, Mormons, and Roy Cohn, the Red-hunting aide to Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the '50s who had become a New York attorney of legendary evil powers by the time of his death in 1986. (Christiansen, 1992)

The play—in two parts, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*—is a seven-hour examination of Reagan-era ethics that addresses such topics as AIDS, Mormonism, and the fall of communism. Critics have hailed it as a significant step beyond the usual kitchen sink concerns of much contemporary American drama. (De Vries)

But the many fantastic flights of *Angels in America* are always tied to the real world of the mid-1980s by Kushner's principal characters, who include two young couples: a pair of gay lovers, and a politically ambitious, rectitudinously Mormon lawyer and his wife. (Rich, March 1992)

Almost anything can happen as history cracks open in *Angels in America*. A Valium-addicted Washington housewife, accompanied by an imaginary travel agent resembling a jazz musician, visits a hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica. An angel crashes with an apocalyptic roar through the ceiling of a Manhattan apartment to embrace a dwindling, Christ-like man spotted with Kaposi's sarcoma. A museum diorama illustrating the frontier history of the Mormons comes to contentious life. (Rich, Nov. 1992)

In his sweeping panorama of American life in Ronald Reagan's America of 1986, playwright Tony Kushner escorts us from the hypocritical centers of power to the dark recesses of a loveless marriage, from the gallows humor of an AIDS patient to the smoldering confusion of a taciturn Mormon. (Winn, 1991)

As if writing in his own fever dream, Mr. Kushner brings into dramatic conjunction the America of the Reagan-Bush years, a dying Roy Cohn, some extraordinary Mormons, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, tales of loathsome duplicity in positions of public trust, memories of the Old Left and of the immigrant experience, with everything viewed through the prism of Prior Walter's tangled relations with his gay friends and ex-lovers. Hover-

ing over it all are God's angels, who have become more insistently meddling since God's recent, somewhat hasty disappearance from heaven. (Canby)

NEGATIVE IMAGES OF MORMONS

Most of the negative images of Mormons reflected in the critics' comments were directly or indirectly related to Mormons' roles as emblematic of negative aspects of conservatism. In some cases, these associations are directly tied to political conservatism and the Reagan 1980s. In other cases, Mormons apparently represent religious social conservatives.

Mormons as Politically Conservative

Critics particularly saw in Joe Pitt the embodiment of conservative contradictions (along with the Roy Cohn character, to which he is linked). He is usually characterized as Reaganite, Republican, and conservative. In Kushner's context, the critics see those characterizations as essentially negative, particularly his Republicanism and the conflict of his conservatism with his homosexuality. Another is the negative effect on his wife, Harper, who is seen as neurotic and distressed.

. . . a Reaganite Mormon lawyer (Wagner)

Alternating the real and unreal, which is Kushner's basic scheme, Part Two then moves on to the interlocked narrative. Louis Ironson, who lived with Prior for three years then abandoned him when he got AIDS, continues his affair with Joe Pitt, a button-down Mormon Republican lawyer who has abandoned his wife, Harper. Harper, agoraphobic and delusional, is more or less looked after by her widowed mother-in-law, Hannah, who has moved to Manhattan from Salt Lake City. (Kelly)

There is Harper, the depressed agoraphobic Mormon wife with a Valium addiction, and Joe, her straight-arrow Republican lawyer husband, trying to deny his homosexuality. (Winer, 1993)

Joe Pitt (Jeffrey King) is a young lawyer, a conservative Republican, a Mormon, an idealist and a closet homosexual. The growing emotional distance between him and his wife Harper (Cynthia Mace) has driven the fragile, agoraphobic woman to Valium-induced distraction. (G. Evans, 1992)

Mormons as Moralistic

Mormonism is clearly perceived by critics (and Kushner) as a conservative religion, with characters Joe and Harper most frequently described in critical and negative terms.

Some critics see that part of the problem for Joe and Harper is linked to a moralizing religion that contradicts their own personal crises, a religion that contains both implicit and explicit images of falseness and hypocrisy.

Joe Pitt, a strait-laced Mormon court clerk, questions his own sexual identity while his Valium-addicted wife, Harper, drifts into hallucinations. (E. Evans, March 1995)

... the tightly wound Republican Mormon attorney Joe Pitt ... (Winn, 17 Oct. 1994)

Angels was not only the first gay-centered play to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama, it came to the fore just as the argument about gays in the military was putting the gay cause at center stage for the first time in U.S. history. With its aggressive scorn for Ronald Reagan and Republicanism; for Mormons and moralizing; and its demonic view of lawyer-dealmaker Roy Cohn, a gay-bashing closet gay and a top-level G.O.P. influence peddler for more than three decades, *Angels* disproved truisms about the unmarketability of political drama. Instead it compellingly reasserted the theater's place in public debate. Hearteningly to theater partisans, *Angels* generated excitement about a drama comparable to the biggest buzz about musicals. (Henry)

Kushner's brilliance is in painting a canvas of epic strokes while hugging close to the intimate lives of his characters. Their interwoven stories revolve around the theme of awakening from denial—awakening from the '80s. The Mormon couple emerge from the wreckage of their false Donna Reed life to go their separate, risky ways. (Hulbert, Dec. 1993)

Showy as these performances are, they are not as effective as the solid, less flamboyant work of Jeffrey King, as the tightly wound, sexually confused Mormon attorney Joseph Pitt, and Kathleen Chalfant, whose mournful voice and slight frame are ideally suited for her dual roles as Pitt's steely mother and the implacable ghost of Ethel Rosenberg.

Also on stage are Belize (portrayed by K. Todd Freeman, who took the title role last season in Steppenwolf Theatre's *The Song of Jacob Zulu*), a gay black man who becomes Cohn's private nurse in the lawyer's final agonizing days,

and a parade of male and female supporting characters portrayed by two actresses—a doctor, a rabbi, an angel messenger, Pitt's strict Mormon mother, a real estate saleswoman and, in one of the play's most telling touches of fantasy, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, who was executed as a Russian spy in 1953 and has now come back to haunt Cohn. (Christiansen, 1992)

Several critics implicitly or explicitly see Joe as representing 1980s-style ambition. While many would not draw a necessarily negative judgment from that image, the perceived consequences in this play seem negative:

Joe Pitt (Jeffrey King), an ambitious Republican lawyer clerking in Federal court, deserts his loyal but long-suffering wife, Harper (Cynthia Mace), once his homosexual longings overpower his rectitudinous Mormon credo. (Rich, Nov. 1992)

Ambitious Mormon lawyer Joseph Pitt (Michael Scott Ryan) and his Valium-addicted wife Harper (Anne Darragh) are the unhappy couple seeking their destiny along separate paths. (Winn, 1991)

Mormons as Neurotic

The Mormon couple, Joe and Harper, also seem to represent what critics and Kushner see as a neurotic American society. Critics, in characterizing Harper, dwell on her addictions and psychological problems. Although some link her psychological state to her Mormon religion and Joe's conservatism, others see Harper as a broader representative of stressed women in American society.

Harper Pitt (Marcia Gay Harden), pill-popping housewife and devout Mormon, has recurrent nightmares that a man with a knife is out to kill her; she also has real reason to fear that the man is her husband, Joe (David Marshall Grant), an ambitious young lawyer with a dark secret and aspirations to rise high in Ed Meese's Justice Department. (Rich, May 1993)

Ms. Harden's shattered, sleepwalking housewife is pure pathos, a figure of slurred thought, voice and emotions, while Mr. Grant fully conveys the internal warfare of her husband, torn between Mormon rectitude and uncontrollable sexual heat. (Rich, May 1993)

There is Harper, the depressed agoraphobic Mormon wife with a Valium addiction, and Joe, her straight-arrow Republican lawyer husband, trying to deny his homosexuality. (Winer, May, 1993)

The theme of '80s denial is hammered in further as we learn that Joe, the well-scrubbed married Mormon, is in fact secretly homosexual. (Le Sourd)

The other pair contains Joseph Pitt, an earnest Mormon attorney and Cohn protege whose straight arrow exterior conceals repressed homosexuality, and Pitt's wife Harper, a Valium-popping, desperately unhappy woman who fantasizes that she is under the protection of a kind of travel agent angel who will transport her away from her troubled marriage into a clean, clear world. (Christiansen, 1992)

Joe Pitt (Jeffrey King) is a young lawyer, a conservative Republican, a Mormon, an idealist and a closet homosexual. The growing emotional distance between him and his wife Harper (Cynthia Mace) has driven the fragile, agoraphobic woman to Valium-induced distraction. (G. Evans, 1992)

He ends up crowing about his part in the destruction of the Rosenbergs, fighting a fraud rap in Washington, and, for reasons never satisfactorily explained, persuading a Mormon law-clerk to join him. Here is the play's second strand, and it, too, has its peppy moments. Nick Reding's uptight Utah boy is, it turns out, desperately struggling to keep himself safely shut in the sexual closet: which helps explain the woozy, half-tranquillised hysteria of his wife, Felicity Montagu. (Nightingale, 1992)

Comic Relief and Anti-Mormonism

Mormons clearly provide much of the comic relief in the plays. Some of the laugh lines are meant to be at least somewhat negative, reflecting negative associations like homophobia, such as when Harper says, "My church doesn't believe in homosexuals" and Prior retorts, "My church doesn't believe in Mormons." However, one critic disapproved of the fun-poking as too easy:

In Cohn, we get self-loathing, self-righteous confusion, repressed homophobia mixed with mad middle-class moralizing that's a plague of its own. Only a few caveats: Kushner doesn't quite fuse the forces set loose in Act I; his gays seem either victims or heroes; the anti-Mormonism is an easy shot; and, finally, I've no idea why two actresses play men's roles. (Nachman)

Most critics noted the humor but without particularly labeling it as negative.

Along the way is some devastatingly pointed hilarity in the face of disease and betrayal, much of it at the expense of the Mormons. This includes a couple of priceless scenes involving a diorama at the Visitor's Center displaying the Mormon hegira to Utah, and the depiction of heaven as a place of beauty much like San Francisco. (Gerard)

Another depicts Prior and Harper visiting the Diorama Room of the Mormon Visitors' Center in New York, where they envision the dummy of a Mormon pioneer coming to life as Joe—who is then romanced by Louis. In its way, the hilarious scene also conveys the second sight of Prior and Harper in intuiting what has happened to their ex-partners. (Kushner)

There are plenty of flashy and cheeky stage effects in *Perestroika*, including Prior's fog-swirled climb to heaven on a neon ladder, an amusing bit of trompe l'oeil that blends live actors with stuffed dummies in a Mormon diorama and Jules Fisher's hellfire-and-brimstone lighting effects. (Winn, Nov. 1993)

Designer Robin Wagner has managed to keep the dozens of scenes flowing, with special effects that are spectacular, yet with a sweetly homemade look, especially a Mormon diorama that comes hilariously to life. (Winer, Nov. 1993, 63)

Mormons as Homophobic

Critics noticed Mormons being used as an example of current institutionalized homophobia, an effect reinforced by Kushner's comments in interviews. In a play whose sympathy is clearly with the plight of gay AIDS victims, the use of Mormons as the representatives of homophobia is worrisome for the creation of images about Mormons. The initial negative reaction that Joe's mother, Hannah, has to his homosexuality is noted, although she is seen by several as a character who develops strong empathy later, particularly for Prior, the AIDS victim.

What would happen to Joe's old-fashioned Mormon mother, Hannah, who sold her Salt Lake City home and traveled to New York to "rescue" her son from his newly revealed sexual identity? (E. Evans, Apr. 1995)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day [sic] Saints is notoriously homophobic, as bad in that regard as the Roman Catholic Church. (Kushner)

POSITIVE IMAGES OF MORMONS

It is important to remember that those outside Mormon culture, including the theater critics who are helping interpret the plays to a wider audience of readers, do not necessarily understand Kushner's symbols in the same way that Mormons do. One telling example concerns the onstage use of temple garments, which many Mormons find offensive. Only one critic even mentions the garments:

Here Wolfe lets us see and sense the connections—Prior's bed sheet tellingly echoed by a Mormon's white nightgown in one of many exquisite touches—as Kushner twines his two stories together. (Winn, May 1993)

Conservatism as Admirable

Not all images of Mormons as conservative are negative. For example, Hannah, Joe's mother, is shown conservatively and negatively at first but develops or emerges into one of the more admirable people in the play:

Whatever one thinks of his artistry or his politics, Kushner is a great entertainer. The one-liners are hilarious. Hannah, the prim, severely-coiffed Mormon elder [sic], who emerges as one of the play's most admirable people, asks Prior Walter, the AIDS-stricken unwilling prophet first if he is a homosexual and then if he is a hairdresser. (Siegel)

The Mormon characters seem to show a positively perceived capacity for growth. In addition to the transformation of Hannah, Joe and Harper also grow out of crises, although perhaps not in ways that most Mormons would find admirable: Joe acknowledges and acts out his homosexuality, while Harper decides to leave him and make her own way:

The other revelatory performance in *Perestroika* comes from Kathleen Chalfant, whose playing of multiple roles, including a brief turn as Cohn's doctor, gives the play some of its most memorable moments. Her transformation as the Mormon mother Hannah Pitt proves one of the most humanizing touches in the play. (Johnson)

Chalfant opens *Perestroika* as an elderly male Bolshevik passionately denouncing the worldwide collapse of idealism, then portrays a grim Mormon matriarch who blossoms as an AIDS caregiver. (Hulbert, Nov. 1993)

"Anyone who goes to the play with an open mind," Kushner said, "will see that the subject of Mormonism is treated with respect and dignity—that the Mormon characters are not in any way made fun of and the religion is not treated with a lack of respect. I would hope people would go and give themselves a chance to enjoy it."

Kushner said he has boxes full of letters from practicing Mormons and former Mormons, people with connections to the LDS Church. Most of the letters have concerned Joe. "Many are from Mormon men," Kushner said, "who discovered their homosexuality and either left the church or left their marriage or went through an experience similar to Joe's." With the exception of one letter from a woman in Idaho, all have been positive. And the one negative letter turned into a positive experience. "I ended up having a very nice exchange of letters with her," Kushner said, "We're still in touch. She is a practicing Mormon and her concern was more with the sexual explicitness of some of the material." (qtd. in Melich)

In this same article, Kushner discusses his first "encounter" with a Mormon named Mary, then a teenager. He describes her as "a great kid, incredibly energetic, straightforward, sincere, intelligent—characteristics I associate with Mormons." He also remembers her LDS parents as "decent people who nevertheless opposed what I consider to be a generally progressive agenda." (ibid.)

Mormons as Idealistic

Some of the critics see Kushner as showing that Mormons, particularly Joe, are idealistic:

At the center is an idealistic young Mormon man, seduced into the dangerous orbit of 1980s power-broker Roy Cohn (the volcanic Ron Leibman), a demonic gay-baiter who in the Decade of Denial denies he has AIDS. (Hulbert, Sept. 1993)

At the same time, Joe Pitt (David Marshall Grant), a promising lawyer and devout Mormon, is trying desperately to hold his marriage together. (Richards)

Peaceful Coexistence

Critics perceive the play as showing a final resolution and the coexistence of very diverse characters, presumably reflecting the ending of *Perestroika*, where Hannah sits with Prior, Louis, and Belize. That scene seems to reflect a view that Mormons have a peaceful, useful role to play in a more tolerant America:

Consisting of a half-dozen plots that run simultaneously, the play encompasses the AIDS death of superlawyer Roy Cohn, bossy angels, a Valium-crazed woman who chews down a tree like a beaver and the breaking up and coming together of gays, Mormons, families and friends. (Stearns)

He derides individualism as outmoded and urges an ill-defined group responsibility. But one can challenge his easy assumption that Reagan and all his works have been discredited; his implicit parallel with the Soviet Union is absurd. Russia may be a land in tumult. America is a land in the midst of social tinkering and tolerance, where the old Mormon world and the, truth to tell, just as old urban Jewish gay world may not often intersect but can comfortably coexist. (Henry)

CONCLUSION

The most striking conclusion of this study is that theater critics do indeed act as gatekeepers between Tony Kushner and the reading public. Despite the visibility of Mormon themes and characters in the plays, only 68 of 370 national reviews (including two by the *London Times*) mentioned Mormons. Since one of our main concerns was the degree to which mass communication processes may affect the assimilation of Mormons into American culture, this omission by the gatekeepers is significant.

It would be interesting in further research to investigate why critics make such choices in gatekeeping selections. Among possible reasons are personal ideology or worldview, lack of background on Mormons (particularly compared to Jews and gays), focus on current issues (particularly AIDS, gays, conservative politics), and a lack of salience of Mormon history and culture for many reviewers. We know from earlier studies that reporters and editors tend to focus on stories that have immediacy, that are sensational to readers, that touch on issues and themes familiar to readers, that deal with cultures that are familiar to both media professionals and readers, and that are linked to famous personalities (Galtung and Ruge).

On the other hand, a number of critics did include coverage of Mormons in their reviews. For those critics, one of the most striking aspects of their reviews seemed to reflect an incorporation or assimilation of Mormon history and symbols into American culture. Ten noted that Mormon symbols and mythology were important to the play as part of

American history and culture. One saw the play as "embracing such diverse and compelling native legends as the Army-McCarthy hearings, the Mormon iconography of Joseph Smith and the MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*." Six mentioned the Mormon migration west and three mentioned the Joseph Smith story. Five noted that Kushner had singled out Mormons and Jews as the focus of his discussion about the relevance of theology at the turn of the millennium. Two of the critics, including one in interview with Kushner, commented on Mormons as a "home-grown" American religion. These mentions were all essentially positive, although some Mormons may not enjoy comparisons of their religion and history to *The Wizard of Oz*.

Other themes in the reviews were more critical. They largely came as critics focused more on Kushner's use of Mormons as a key part of the 1980s Reagan era. Although this connection was neutral in some reviews, most mentions of Mormons and the Reagan era were negative.

While most of the positive mentions were linked to major themes involving Mormonism, most of the negative mentions of Mormons were linked with description of specific characters. Joe Pitt was characterized by eleven reviews as a Reaganite, conservative, Republican, well-scrubbed, tightly wound, taciturn, straight-arrow, sexually confused, closet homosexual, innocent, confused, idealistic, and ambitious. Harper was negatively characterized by ten reviewers as fragile, woozy, depressed, Valium-addicted, pill-popping, agoraphobic, devout, shattered, sleepwalking, and desperately unhappy. Hannah is shown by four reviewers as both positive and negative through such terms as grim, prim, severely coiffed, and old-fashioned, but also as a "Mormon matriarch who blossoms as an AIDS caregiver."

Overall, we find a rough balance between positive and negative mentions of Mormonism by the theater critics who reviewed *Angels*. We conclude that, while Mormon critics like Abbott have some cause to be concerned over the impression that *Angels* gives of Mormons, the play does show an essentially positive acceptance of a great deal of Mormon history and imagery into the American canon of popular culture and history. The diversity of reviewers' themes and images of Mormons cited from *Angels* shows us that we cannot assume, only on the basis of our own

reading of a text like *Angels*, what the media professionals' or public's discourse about Mormons will be.

The assimilation of Mormon symbols and history into cultural productions, like *Angels*, not controlled by Mormons bothers some Mormons rather deeply. In a dialogue carried out on the Association for Mormon Letters Internet list (AML-List), playwright Thom Duncan said:

I am angry because, frankly, it shoulda been us up there. As we left the theatre, I said to Margie, "Well, there goes any chance any Mormon playwright will ever have of telling our story on the big stage. The first time we attempt to show Joseph having his First Vision, people will call it derivative of *Angels in America*. Gone forever is any chance for any faithful Mormon playwright to tell our story in a dramatic context that won't look like we plagiarized. The most dramatic, mystical, and wonderful symbols we have have been usurped forever. They are no longer distinctively ours.

Scott Parkin, posting on the same list and also a playwright, disagreed:

Just a quibble with Thom's comment that our own icons are now forever lost to us and Kushner will forever get the credit for innovating them. I disagree. Any critic who believes Kushner created the story of the First Vision is dangerous to himself and others and should be ignored at all costs. Mormon symbols are no more lost to us than the menorah is lost to Jews or the cross lost to Catholics. It is unfortunate that a non-Mormon found a way to use them for commercial benefit before a Mormon did, but that neither invalidates the icons, nor makes them impossible for further use.

We find that looking at critical responses, as well as Kushner's plays, reveals, among other things, that many of our symbols are already in play in American pop culture—sometimes in company with *The Wizard of Oz*, granted, but out there and visible. It seems we ought to have more insight into them and be able to use them better; but it's also clear that if we don't, others will. We don't think anyone has preempted the symbols, but we do have to deal with the fact that our symbols have acquired a life of their own in popular culture, with a layer of Kushner's interpretations building over earlier layers. We have to deal with that popular understanding of them,

right up there with the Wizard of Oz, as well as with our own preferred interpretation of them.

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Renegotiating Scylla and Charybdis: A New Look at Insider and Outsider Stereotypes of Mormonism

John Bennion

Readers have unpacked Brian Evenson's collection of stories, *Altmann's Tongue*, in diverse (perverse) ways:

The writer of an anonymous letter felt "like someone who has eaten something poisonous and is in desperate need to get rid of it" (qtd. in Jorgensen, 2).

Bruce W. Jorgensen: "Here is an alternative formulation. Perhaps the book poses such a question as this to us: . . . Can you love a serial killer? If you were God, could you, would you try to save him?" (7).

Rex Lee: "If his future work follows the same pattern of extreme sadism, brutality and gross degradation of women characteristic of 'Altmann's Tongue,' such a publication would, in our view, not further his cause as a candidate for continuing faculty status" (Nuttall, 1).

Susan E. Howe: "[A] text is a cultural artifact as well as an aesthetic construct. As a text enters a culture, it may be appropriated by naive readers who share some of the assumptions of the brutal characters and use the text to justify their own brutality" (3). She adds, "Violence is redundant. To create violence in literature, when there is so much of it in our lives, is not a stretch of imagination. It is a very easy choice, not worthy of the best Mormon minds writing in the last days of the twentieth century" (4).

Gary Browning: "Evenson is a most effective teacher of the difficulties in judging rightly and righteously" (6).

Brian Evenson, in an interview with me: "When I published *Altmann's Tongue*, I didn't expect anybody in the Mormon culture to read it. . . . I guess what happened was an audience was created for the book that I didn't expect. Suddenly, I was confronted with people reading the book in a much different way than I would ever have thought to read it. I

would see it as a misreading I guess, but maybe it's valid in its own way or own terms."

I have little interest in being sucked into the whirlpool of the *Altmann* fray, proclaiming yet another reading that would argue with or reconcile all these others. Instead, the question I'd like to pose is this: What are the conditions under which a reader closes the text (literally and figuratively), refuses to suspend the narrative any longer in imagination, says "Enough!" and, naming the book, is finished with further negotiation? The question is important partly because the readerly act of closing a text seems linked to the political act of suppressing the author.

Evenson's book fits in a certain class of Mormon literature—books that attempt to steer between the Scylla of Mormon readers and the Charybdis of New York publishing houses (or is it the other way around?). Evenson and writers such as Maurine Whipple, Virginia Sorensen, and Orson Scott Card have succeeded with their intended national audience but have been chastised—sometimes denounced—by their Mormon audience, an audience that feels either cheated or violated by the text. I propose that answers, if not reconciliation between Mormon reader and national-oriented writer, can be won by seeing with double vision, by viewing texts from both perspectives. I will shout warnings from the mast *and* look up with hunger from the ocean floor.

Readers of Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* have also responded diversely, with significant implications for the author and the book's success. Part of the discussion was and still is sexual content, which provided dissonance for many varieties of Mormon readers. One early critic, Apostle John A. Widtsoe, wrote that Whipple's "evident straining for the lurid obscures the true spirit of Mormonism, and misleads the reader" (qtd. in Ashton, 36). This single review, according to Katherine Ashton, "probably

contributed most to the non-acceptance of the book by the Mormon audience" (36). Widtsoe's reading conditioned and bound the readings of others, who thought of his review as a proclamation. The book won the 1938 Houghton-Mifflin Prize; but in a letter to a close friend, Tom Spies, Whipple refers to "the anguish and disillusionment that *Joshua* has brought me" (qtd. in Ashton, 36).

Widtsoe's review refers not only to "lurid" sexuality but to a violation of the "spirit of Mormonism." He implies that the text is inconsistent with the reality of Mormon experience generally.

Yawning before us is the maw that swallowed *The Giant Joshua* and others—that brand of reading (and of criticism, recognizing that critics often shape the reading of a text) which measures literature by first defining the indefinable—general Mormon experience—and then by judging how well a text correlates to that standard. Dissonance from that standard causes many readers to dismiss books. I want to take their dissonance seriously, on the terms of the Mormon reader, that generic figure who only exists as millions of different beings.

At the end of *The Giant Joshua* the heroine, Clory, is dying:

And now there is no more time. Already the radiance is trembling on the horizon, the flushed light leans down from the west, the Great Smile beckons, and suddenly, with the shock of a thousand exploding light-balls, she recognizes the Great Smile at last. That which she had searched for all her life had been right there in her heart all the time. She, Clorinda MacIntyre, had a testimony! (633)

How does a reader signify the problematic phrase "the Great Smile"? Is it testimony, God, or the Holy Ghost—leading Clory to recognize what is in her heart? It is certainly not the phrase mainstream Mormons would use to describe any motion of the spirit. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich comments:

Whenever things get too bad for her [Clory], she turns to a kind of kindergarten mysticism, dwelling on thoughts of "The Unopened Door" and "The Great Smile" (which has a way of turning into Charlie Brown's "Great Pumpkin" once the spell of the book is broken" (254).

Another critic, Eugene England, suggests that Whipple's abstractions of spirituality arise out of a novice misreading of Emerson's *Oversoul* or *Transparent Eyeball* (England, 19). Certainly neither of these two critics is the kind of naive reader who wouldn't give Whipple or any other Mormon writer a fair read. The dissonance felt by these Mormon readers is a serious matter.

Another watery pit opens before our barque (the barque of the text, suspended again in imagination). Some might say that Whipple is unable to describe testimony because she didn't have one. We steer quickly away: first, individual faith or its lack is a matter for God or bishops to judge, and second, that kind of criticism devolves into judging literature by resonance, as if anyone's vision is beyond conditioning. (A more genuine question, although one that is nearly as dangerous, is whether personal anger at Mormonism pollutes her writing, making it maudlin or melodramatic—but that is a study for another day.)

The problem of dissonance could be resolved for a naive reader by replacing "The Great Smile" with more stereotypical Mormon descriptions of testimony such as "a warm feeling," "burning in the bosom," or anything that follows the words "I know . . ." when delivered in the context of standing and declaring. But are these formulations any less vague? Testimony—that personal, inner communication between God and each person, facilitated by the Holy Ghost—may be undecipherable to someone who hasn't focused on the experience although, as a writer, I must hold faith that words are no less reliable for describing matters of the spirit than they are for matters of the mind or body. Any worn phrase will be shorthand for testimony, more jarring to the Gentile ear of a national audience than the phrase "the Great Smile."

The problem Whipple faced was how to signify the Mormon conception of testimony for an audience unfamiliar with the traditional Mormon phrases. Should she use images and ideas borrowed from philosophy or other religions to create a bridge for the non-Mormon reader? But any such bridge causes dissonance for even excellent Mormon readers, who sense her rendering of testimony as vagueness, words that miss the mark.

I see another yawning pit in our watery pathway. Every Mormon critic and writer yearns for the perfect line, perhaps in the Adamic language, that is so complete that the sign hangs in the air like a ripe white fruit, so full of meaning that all readers can signify it as testimony, as the tail-end of one of God's fleeting thoughts. Such a word would explode all boundaries, establish a new order in language, be the beginning of a Mormon writing as great as Shakespeare's. But of course all language is earth-bound, provisional, and conditional.

I've taken nearly half my space just describing the problem: Mormons often want their Mormonism straight, unadulterated with secular philosophy, and historically they have been inclined to mistrust writing that has been adapted to a national audience. What such writers do to succeed, I believe, is often precisely what the imagined Mormon reader finds offensive. So what is it they do, these Mormon writers aspiring for a Gentile audience?

On May 8, 1995, on the Association for Mormon Letters internet list, Holly Welker commented: "What I'd really like to see writers on this list address is the question of audience, particularly how to write about Mormon experience for a secular, mainstream literary audience." I want to read responses to that question backwards, for evidence of what may turn *Mormon* readers off. In a May 17 message, Pauline Mortensen responds:

If one writes with a tacit understanding of truth that excludes most of what the non-Mormon audience views as reality, I think the writer will have problems. In other words, it is the silent spaces in a text which speak the loudest, the assumptions that one writer or another believes to be true which need not be spoken, but yet determine the outcome of the plot. These can be most annoying even within a culture. . . . In the end, I guess what I am talking about is narrative technique and closure. While your characters may come to certain conclusions, your text should be more careful about drawing small circles of en-closure in a big world. What matters most is the writer's politics and agenda rather than the setting.

The Mormon writer must expunge from her writing arrogance about possessing universal truth, an arrogance marked by spaces, which members feel they read accurately. Even within a culture, Mortensen

suggests, the assumption is offensive that the writer himself is privy to all the secrets. But this "insider" feeling may be exactly what some Mormon readers want. Related to this expunging of arrogance the national writer of literary fiction must resist a yearning for textual closure, the same textual closure the Mormon reader often swaddles himself in.

Later the readers of the AML list considered Walter Kirn's "Whole Other Bodies," another text which succeeds with a national audience, but which has been problematic for various Mormon readers. On 30 May, Mortensen describes her own reading:

The narrator describes his religious conversion as a joyous experiment that failed. I am both convinced by the joyousness of the conversion and the emptiness that follows. And I hover forever between the sincerity and the irony of that joyousness. It is the perfect story because it has no answers. It will keep playing over and over in my head and attempt to resolve itself every time but never will. And people will keep anthologizing it and commenting on it for that same reason.

This text refuses to close, remains continually animated in Mortensen's mind; such openness relies on a quality of her mind and a quality of the text. A text which is easily named would not remain open to interpretation. For many Mormon readers, I suspect, a text which is difficult to name will not signify universal truth, a quality such readers want in their texts.

On 5 June Mortensen articulates how a perpetually open reading occurs. In the following excerpt, she looks for contextual clues and does a close reading of Kirn's opening sentence—"I remember the time of my family's conversion, that couple of months before He saved our souls forever":

For me, the first context that gave me clues as to how to read the text was from the other stories themselves. Kirn teaches us how to read his stuff, as does any author. He uses sophisticated literary devices, non-traditional Mormon-like devices. For instance, in "Whole Other Bodies" he begins with the ending. And in fact he begins with the cliché ending as in "happily ever after" only he says "that couple of months before He changed our souls forever." By beginning with the cliché ending, he calls it into question. It is the question or conflict of the story. Will it be forever? And I say look, this story was not published as essay (if it were, I would read it straight

without irony), and it was not published by Signature or Deseret Book or Bookcraft, so what might be going on here outside of my own Mormon reading? . . . The word "forever" from an outsider's view has got to be a major joke. And in fact, from my experience, forever means a lot of different things. I will be your friend forever. I will love you forever. And so forth. The word "soul" has likewise fallen out of literary and philosophic circles and has only re-emerged recently in the New Age stuff (although in religious literature it has remained current). Kirn's story occurs in this outside context where these words have varied connotations and I take all of these contexts seriously when I read his story.

She then discusses how Kirn uses "poetic/fictional license" on realistic detail to

cross over to the outsider point of view in order to comment on the Mormon text. In other words, he shares assumptions with the non-Mormon audiences. These are ironic generalizing moments that teach me how to read. If Kirn says Testimony Sunday and Baptize the Dead [phrases which Mike Austen said on the list mark the story as written by an outsider], I sense that he sacrifices detail for the broader generalizing commentary. Such details teach me to read the word "forever" in an ambiguous way.

But again, the same factors which open the text for her, its complexity, ambiguity, its adaptation or even distortion of accepted mainstream Mormon materials and fictional techniques, are exactly what may cause dissonance for even sophisticated Mormon readers, who sense that Kirn has the Mormon universe wrong. Many might claim that this is an accident, that somehow Kirn could have got it all right for both universes. When I think about the conditional nature of discourse, I must believe this to be a dangerous assumption.

Mortensen, in a recent phone conversation, confirmed that her method of reading is patterned after that in Roland Barthes's *S/Z*. He discusses two kinds of responses to texts (writerly and readerly) and two aspects of texts (the denotative and the connotative). What does it mean to deal with a text in a writerly manner? He postulates:

Our evaluation [of a text] can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing. . . . [What] is within the practice of the writer and what has left it: which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to

desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? (4)

He describes a kind of reading where the text is reimagined, remains animated, open, interactive—as if the reader is writing. Barthes continues:

Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness—he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly. (4)

What forces might shut a text, making it readerly for a Mormon reader? Authority might, faith in what someone else has said about a text. Evenson, in my interview, said, "There's an article that appeared in *This People*, where it was clear that the information she'd gathered was from the press rather than from actually reading the book." Dissonance with the known Mormon universe might shut a text. Readers may fail to recognize that even the good word of the gospel is conditional because of the language we use to describe it. Either of these might bind a Mormon reader with seriousness, render her incapable of creative and flexible play. Such a reader becomes subject, a receiver of ideas someone has already processed. Barthes further defines the writerly text as:

a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5)

The moment of the closing of a text involves a writerly reader becoming readerly in the presence of a unitary system. I imagine myself to be a college student grappling with Evenson's stories, being

bombarded by violent acts, so many that I can no longer read them as satire, metaphor, or other literary device, but only as repetitive, repulsive violence—the poisonous spew of a depraved writer. Worse, this writer is not some foreigner who knows nothing about goodness, but he is Mormon. I judge his words against the standard of Mormonism. Or I imagine myself as Widtsoe reading Whipple's text. The characters are trapped and bound by sexuality, doubt, conflict. "These are not the good people I know, not my good ancestors." I can no longer imagine Clory and the others as alive, deserving of my interest and compassion. Once again, they become the page-bound devices of a writer; I'm trapped in the literal. As Ulrich put it, the spell is broken.

What does this mean for the Mormon reader? Have I blundered into the hazardous assumption that Mormonism is a monolithic system that prompts readers to close down? To what extent do Mormons believe that the gospel of Christ is unitary and singular? These are questions I can't hope to answer today. But I can comment briefly on the relationship between faith and our methods of reading texts, especially sacred texts.

The difference between a writerly reading and a readerly one is in part the difference between being bound by the words and being able to achieve a certain kind of distance or play, something we avoid with religious texts. Is it any surprise that many whose training in serious reading comes from the scriptures would savor unitary, singular, and unambiguous meaning (denotative meaning) rather than playful, experimental, expansive (connotative) meanings?

Barthes differentiates denotation and connotation:

Connotation is the way into the polysemy of the classic text, to that limited plural of the text....

Definitionally, it is a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text): we must in no way restrain this relating. . . . (8).

Connotation releases the double meaning, "corrupts the purity of communication," "is a deliberate 'static,'" "a counter communication," (9).

Is our imagined Mormon reader tempted to read fiction as he reads the scriptures, in a denotative, readerly manner? "In the beginning was the word," writes St. John. Christ embodies his gospel but bodies it forth in the scripture, the literal word of God. We believe this and, as I mentioned above, are tempted to read the scriptures as referendum, as unitary truth. We are inclined to believe that in the scriptures, perhaps in all writing that is pure enough to be moderated by the Holy Ghost, signifier and signified are miraculously one. The authority of the text is unarguable. This belief, as I have described it, is at once our only salvation and the greatest hazard of all. There must needs be opposition even in the Word—the opposition between authority and agency, the central opposition of our religion. No matter how much we may reside in the presence of the Holy Ghost, even if the scriptures could be a perfect readerly text, we still come to them conditionally, with incomplete faith and divided mind. Reading the scriptures as if they are a closed or readerly text may actually impede our growth, grace to grace. We cannot afford to allow the scriptures to become merely received, easily named. I will read this and any other text by wavering between the readerly and writerly, between knowledge and faith, between reverence for authority and reliance on agency and autonomy.

So what do we do? Nothing revolutionary. We simply keep writing criticism and teaching, opening fictional and scriptural texts to readers. We must do it again and again and again until more readers understand that a closed reading of a text is not the only righteous reading.

Darrell Spencer, the author of the final text on which I will practice my double-visioned reading, is another Mormon writer who angles his material toward a national audience. Like Evenson, he makes the problem of distortion between signified and signifier the focus of his text. He accepts the distortion as given, as a premise of his fiction. His stories resist closure. For example, one story in *Our Secret's Out* is entitled "The Glue That Binds Us." The original phrase, "The ties that bind," is ambiguous concerning the virtue of bonds with others, presumably families. Some ties that bind sustain us, some imprison. Spencer further twists the phrase by

substituting the word *glue* for *ties*. The title leaves the reader with a question. What is the glue that binds?

The story involves an apparent love triangle. The narrator, Colfisch, returning to Utah for a visit, is worried that Gloria, his wife and a marginal Mormon, is leaving him for their host, Benjamin Gust, identified in the story as "a priesthood holder." Another character, a friend of Gust's, is Zinnia Smith, also Mormon.

Colfisch possesses physical anxiety that the glue binding him to Gloria is disintegrating. "We're in our fifties, and we've left billing and cooing behind. Love isn't the question. What matters is liking. Liking counts. Love can't save you. What goes wrong is wives come to dislike husbands, and husbands come to dislike wives" (135). Love and like may not bind. Bodies no longer bind. "No one's arguing I'm pretty at fifty-five." He describes the way his body is falling apart, but it's more than his body. Something is messing up his relation to Gloria. He blames the gods. "In a fit, some spoilsport goaty god has come down hard on me." Before the tangled threat from fate, gods, and disintegrating love—his heart goes thud-hud. "Men, women. Women, men. Hear the beat? With me, it's a thud-hud" (135).

How might Barthe's methods be used to explore this text? In *S/Z*, an analysis of Balzac's story "Sarrasine," Barthes breaks the text into lexemes and uses free association to identify possible connotative elements. He marks the lexemes with five codes, but I won't elaborate his whole system here. Instead I will apply only two, the codes of action (ACT) and cultural reference (REF).

The following passage comes early in the story. Spencer uses a traditional verbal signal to mark the beginning of an anecdote—"So a few days ago . . ." The anecdote was told first to Colfisch by his wife, and then by Colfisch to the reader, explaining why he thinks some "god has come down hard on" him. He frames the anecdote with references to the gods, who, like the Navaho trickster coyote, are in the mood to interfere. The anecdote contains two familiar acts: (1) being accosted by someone on the street, and (2) giving facts to a journalist, who gets them wrong. Spencer writes:

Yahweh [REF: Hebrew god], overfed and world-weary, grows testy, calls in a few minor gods so his words

will be heard, and says, "Let's break the rules, like pots."

So, a few days ago, on a Monday, a man comes up to Gloria on a downtown Salt Lake City street and hands her eleven one-hundred-dollar bills [ACT: Being accosted on the street for charity]. The story makes the *Tribune*, only the reporter bungles the facts [ACT: getting things wrong by carelessness or intention]. He says one thousand dollars. It was *eleven* hundred, *eleven* one-hundred-dollar bills. The man did not say, as the paper says he did, "God wants you to have this." He said, "Greetings from your Heavenly Father and your Heavenly Mother [REF: Mormon god], who want you to have this money in order that you shall never want again." If you'd heard him, Gloria claims, you would not have forgotten the exact words.

When she sat me down to tell me what happened, she said, "The young man said, 'Greetings.' Greetings, like he was from another planet." [REF: Extraterrestrials or angels] He said Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, not god. "How did they get it wrong?" she said, and she studied me like I had something up my sleeve [REF: hoax, getting things wrong to trick someone]. Her look was hard enough to make me wonder if I was part of some plot [REF: hoax].

Like I say, the gods interfere. Sure, we invite them. We wear hair shirts, smudge ash across our foreheads. We cry, *For pity! For pity!* and sing, *De Profundis*. We file our grievances. (135-36)

The anecdote shows that messages fall apart; the journalist gets wrong or reinvents most of what happened to Gloria. Like the game "Post Office," the message is transformed in the telling. But was there ever a time when accident or hoax didn't enter into the event? Is Gloria's account, or Colfisch's, or Spencer's, for that matter, any more reliable? "True" accounts are drawn into question.

Even God is ambiguous. Spencer refers to God variously—first as "some spoilsport goaty god," "Yahweh," and "Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother," and as "the gods." Spencer's audience is primarily non-Mormon (*Our Secret's Out* was published by the University of Missouri Press), an audience that can take this mild ambiguity in stride. But because he doesn't refer to the Mormon god as a Mormon would, his references would discomfit some of my Mormon students, those who want one signification for God.

The act of being accosted on the street is also rendered ambiguous. Instead of asking for charity, or some political or religious influence, this man *gives*

charity. He proclaims himself as a messenger from Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, but he says "Greetings" as if he is a visitor from another planet. Was she visited by one of the Three Nephites? Again, the sign is ambiguous. Messages go awry and signification is unreliable.

Colfisch attributes this unreliability to the gods, as if deity has intervened between signifier and signified, and to the location, as if only in Salt Lake City would a man accost a rich woman and give her money, a gift from Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother.

So how do we interpret the anecdote? Who is playing a hoax—Colfisch or Gloria? The man on the street? Spencer? The Gods?

I'm going to skip to the end of the story, where Gloria reports another act—parking in a car and praying. Like the story of the man who gave money, the act is seen even by the characters as ambiguous and puzzling. Spencer writes:

Gloria says, "Last night, when Gust brought me home, he asked me to sit in the car for a minute." [ACT: Intimacy] She sips a Coke I got her.

I think, *Necking?* [ACT: Intimacy/sexual]

She says, "He asked me to pray with him." [ACT: Intimacy/religious]

"To pray with him?"

"He and Zinnia are sleeping together," she says. [REF: Casual sex/Adultery]

I can see Zinnia's bronze hair on a pillow and her fingers putting quote marks around *sleeping together*. [ACT: Casual sex/adultery] Her husband is a Mormon bishop.

I say, "He wanted to pray about screwing around?" [ACT casual sex/adultery]

"Well," she says, "it's bad. I tried to lighten it up. I said, 'I don't pray. I wring my hands.' [ACT: Joking/lightening]"

"How?" I say. "On your knees?" [ACT: Religious intimacy/prayer]

"Just sitting in the car."

"Did you?"

"He did."

"He prayed in front of you?" [ACT: Religious intimacy/prayer]

"It was no big thing," she says. [ACT: Lightning] (148-49)

Colfisch has trouble with the mixture of sexual and religious intimacy, and so do Spencer's intended

readers. Colfisch knows that the story of the first sexual alliance, told in the guise of neediness and reverence, may be a rhetorical device in a second seduction. I propose that many Mormon writers would write the ambiguity out of this scene. A priesthood holder, while dating one man's wife, wants to pray with her about his adultery with a bishop's wife? Despite the fact that this kind of moral ambiguity happens daily all across Utah, the Mormon reader feels he must make judgments, delineate sin clearly. Attempting to render all signifiers in a unitary manner would transform this into a text which would hardly disturb. It isn't merely content but ambiguous signification which offends.

The story finishes thus:

By five we're headed west, Gloria driving, me letting Salt Lake City leak from my bones. Gloria wrote Gust a note and stuck it to the front door. It said, Eleven hundred dollars burning a hole in my purse. Wendover calling us. See you next time and think about coming to San Diego.

She says to me, "Zinnia's a mess."

I say, "What'd you tell her?"

"To run off with Gust." [REF: Casual sexual relationship]

"Will she?"

Gloria looks at me in the dark car and says, "You don't know what it is to be a Mormon."

"Do you?"

She says, "You don't think you can be a god [REF]."

"And you do?"

"Mormons do."

"Mormons can be God."

"A god. And Gust thinks so. He's a priesthood holder." (150)

Colfisch doesn't understand Zinnia's bind. If she loves Gust and that relationship is stronger than the one with her husband the bishop, she might run off with Gust. Gloria explains that both believe they can become gods; Colfisch is only further confused, further determined to escape the muddle he believes is Utah. Would my students read this exchange as sacrilegious, as not representing the Mormon perspective accurately? Probably many of them will. But they're missing the point of the story by reducing it to the literal denotation on the page, missing the play with language.

On 5 June 1995, Pauline Mortensen said on the AML list, "As Mormons, I think we tend to 'buy in' to certain aspects of a story, because we want to buy in to them, and thus ignore reading the text from other contexts." For that person there is one text, the text created in his or her mind.

The pessimistic view is that a reader used to readerly texts will always close a writerly text, clinging to the belief that for each signifier in language, there should be one signified. I don't mean to imply that Mormon readers *shouldn't* have problems with some texts. *Altmann's Tongue* is extremely violent and the end of *The Giant Joshua* is genuinely vague. In addition, I believe that closed or readerly readings of some texts can be beneficial. The development of sophisticated moral sense may involve reading both texts that establish moral certitude and texts that undermine that confidence. But still I hope as a teacher that Mormons used to readerly texts can also see that continuing revelation demands an open relationship to at least the text of God's mind, and perhaps to earthly texts as well. Such an understanding can come only from carefully opening a text again and again in the presence of students and readers of critical essays.

I hope that this process might make us a people slow to prematurely close a text and condemn the writer—wise as serpents and harmless as doves. As Gary Browning said in the review I quoted earlier:

I believe the most important message to be drawn from "The Father, Unblinking" is, given the sparse and contradictory knowledge we have of anyone but ourselves, and, perhaps, even of ourselves, and the ambiguities in so much of what we experience, rendering judgment, especially of another, is most perilous. Too much is imperfectly known: motivations, intentions, desires of the heart, generic predispositions, environment, experience, culture, and much more. (6)

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Undefining "Faithful Fiction": (The Sophic Stranger Rides Again) (With[out] His Evil Twin)

B. W. Jorgensen

This is not—or I don't mean it to be—the Mormon literary bout of the century, but rather a perplexed and finally self-questioning essay. Its cast of historical-fictional characters includes "RHC," author of "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice" and various reviews; "bwj," author of "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say"¹ and other essays and reviews; "I," author of the present essay; "Levi Peterson," author of *The Backslider*; "Gene England"; et al. My unaccountable twin Wayne had consented to co-author this paper, but backed out at the last minute, on the pretext of an exclusive interview with Elvis in Las Vegas. I suspect he's holed up somewhere in Southern Utah, some pretty place like Long Valley, and may unpredictably communicate with me during the course of this paper by shortwave radio.

In a review of Gerald Lund's *Pillar of Light*, RHC contrasted "faithful fiction" with "maverick fiction,"² and explained, "The purpose of faithful fiction is to instruct, to caution, to warn, and to demonstrate how God touches the individual lives of his children to effect their salvation and exaltation" (78). Those verbs, I take it, pretty clearly say that "faithful fiction" is didactic fiction.

In 1979 bwj had tried to use the "Grammar of the Types of Fiction" theoretically argued by Sheldon Sacks (1-69) to make room for another kind of fiction that, if written by Mormon writers, might still be "faithful" in the sense that it would reflect—by using—a Mormon writer's values, though it would not be formally constructed (as didactic fiction is) to "demonstrate" the credibility or truth of those values. He tried to make room for the writing and criticism of (non-didactic) "represented action" in a tradition dominated by (didactic) "apologue."³ RHC, I believe, was then, as now, working within a

two-term set of options: you're either *for* or *against*, in the fiction you write; and if you're *for*, your fiction will *be for by being didactic*, by instructing and demonstrating. That, of course, won't allow for the other option: you might *use* Mormon beliefs to write a novel that would not ostensibly try to demonstrate (apologue-ize) or denigrate (satire-ize) those beliefs; but your use of those beliefs to judge characters, actions, and thoughts might be taken to reveal your belief in them. Every form of fiction bears its writer's testimony; but each form—satire, apologue, or "action"—does it in a different way.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. (Luke 18:10-13; cf. Matt. 6:1-6)

Somewhere on the way to Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus said this parable "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). I will say a hard and dangerous saying here: Overtly didactic fiction, which marks itself "Mormon" as with a badge, is like unto the righteous Pharisee praying; non-didactic fiction, which cannot certify its testimony or its doctrinal or moral purity on its lapel but hopes God's word may be graven in its heart, is like unto the publican praying.

I will pursue, implicitly, a two-sided question in

this paper: Who is "faithful" to what or whom in the writing and reading of "Mormon fiction"? I am also asking, Faithful how? RHC's style of "faithful criticism" is to judge putative "Mormon" literary works, finally (often initially), as either for or against the Church; to read fictions ideologically, i.e., doctrinally or didactically; to take the critical moment as an exigency for "defending the faith."

But is "reading by faith" the same thing as guarding doctrinal purity or shielding readers from heterodoxy? RHC holds that

it is [Mormon critics'] challenge, when acting as LDS critics, to promote a truly Mormon literature, to read and critique LDS writing with eyes of faith, with feet firm-set in Mormon metaphors. Then, allowing the LDS writers their *donnée*, that their work is faithfully grounded in the Mantic realities of the spiritual world, in important *essences*, to sound that work for honesty and integrity, to subject that portrayal of Mormon reality to the most rigorous literary standards. ("Attuning," 56)

Does that sound like loyalty first (the work must portray "Mormon reality" as Mantic), then "honesty and integrity" and "literary standards"? "Allowing the LDS writers their *donnée*," with its liberal-sounding echo of a famous statement of Henry James,⁴ is quickly belied in the rather anti-Jamesian clause that follows to define what "their *donnée*" necessarily will be. RHC says his position "can be misconstrued. . . as being exclusionary" ("Attuning," 55). But how? How can "certainly not LDS-Mantic poems" be construed as anything but an "exclusionary" critical judgment? That critical act in RHC's review of *Harvest*, to be sure, is consistent with the first stage of his program for LDS critics: first decide if it's "truly Mormon," then "sound that work for honesty and . . ." But heck, when we've decided it's not "truly Mormon," why bother more?

I suggest that a "faithful critic" might be "faithful" first of all to his sources; and I find that RHC in "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice" falls somewhat short of the mark. The earliest signal of this, his title, translates Bill Mulder's plural phrase "authentic voices" (211) into a monolithic singular, "The Authentic Mormon Voice." The move seems deeply characteristic: a reduction to an "essence" which can then be upheld as an ideal, applied as a test, or, if it is the wrong "essence," dismissed.

RHC does admit that bwj "urg[ed] a Mormon literature [he was talking about criticism] that is hospitable to the stranger at the gate as well as to the next-door-neighbor" and later says "Mormon literature must continue to be hospitable to the writings of those among the Latter-day Saints who are struggling with doubt and are torn by the old tension" ("Attuning," 51, 54). But before that, he taints the hospitality metaphor in the bombastic phrase, "our inner *Schweinhund*, our doubting, skeptical, Sophic, eye-single-to-the-glory of secular humanism willingness to be hospitable to virtually any attack upon our own church or its leaders" ("Attuning," 52). (Did bwj do that? recommend that? Where?) At the outset he says bwj "firmly [shut] the door on [his] assertion that an anthology subtitled 'Contemporary Mormon Poems' should reflect a Mormon *Weltanschauung* and ethos" (51). No, bwj didn't shut any door; in fact, he thinks that poems by Mormons (and maybe ex-Mormons) *will* or *may* do exactly that, and that a reader's, reviewer's, or critic's job, in service to Mormon reading (the central concern of his Address), is to help discover that, make it audible and discussable. He wants to bathe and feed and clothe the apparent strangers: baptize them, give them the sacrament and the temple ordinances. When we do this, we say, they become adopted (or are found to have been all along) children of Israel. The metaphor strains here: I don't know quite how it might apply to poems and stories as well as persons, but I did want to think about whether it might.

bwj's "quarrel" with RHC's Review was not at all destructive in its intention; rather, corrective and constructive: he wanted to bring in more guests (who he believed were already at the table) and let their voices be usefully heard by the rest of us, not shut out before they could speak. bwj is not at all sure a Mormon critic's job is to separate sheep and goats or wheat and tares; that's the Lord's and the angels' task, and not yet. Meantime, he's hauling in a huge netful of fish, and he's not too worried about the boat swamping, since he's learned to swim in deep water, or tread water if he must. And who's that stranger on the shore with the little fire going, waving us in for breakfast after we've been out here toiling all night? Don't we know that fellow, and won't we rejoice to hunker down on the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world and eat with

him? If you get the metaphors. Wayne sez he thinks he does.

RHC has bwj "insisting at last that 'Maybe Mormonism itself has no "essence" but only a story'" ("Attuning," 51). I guess that is a rather insistent "Maybe"; yes, when bwj says "Maybe" *he means Maybe*. He is also said to be "asserting that 'It's a striving after wind to pursue the "essence" of Mormon literature'" (51). What he *said* was, "I suspect it's a striving after wind" (47), and he *meant* what he *said*: when he *suspects*, he doesn't *assert*. As "defender of the faith," RHC seems to need an "essence" to do battle with, and if bwj supposes and suspects, RHC will have him assert and insist.

Whom was RHC talking about?—"our doubting, skeptical, Sophic, eye-single-to-the-glory of secular humanism," etc.? I don't think the plural pronoun here is one bwj could join, or ever has joined. Me neither, sez Wayne. Correct us if we're wrong. And when RHC goes on to tell the story of "most of us . . . LDS literati," he's not telling bwj's story, or mine or Wayne's. We didn't "leave our Mormon Home Places to become steeped at . . . worldly universities in the alluring secular *Weltanschauung* of a relentless, overweening, skeptical, and triumphant empiricism" and come back with "a quiver-full of tyrannic and dogmatic literary ideologies, bristling with a wonderful array of arcane critical tools," etc. ("Attuning," 52). Wayne sez he wishes he *had* gone to a school like that, and he's saving his story for his Great (Maybe-)Mormon Novel. But whose story does RHC think it is? Must be that of some "essential" Mormon literatus: a straw man. I wish he'd deal with the sentences bwj wrote.

Besides setting bwj's Address up as a highly flammable target, RHC, I think, too cavalierly handles his secondary sources. To erect his Sophic/Mantic dichotomy, he takes (via Curtis Wright) Hugh Nibley's "Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic," reduces three terms to two, and then sunders into a disjunctive polarity what Nibley (and Wright after him) treated conjunctively. RHC's "*Mantic* versus the *Sophic*" ("Attuning," 54) appears, in both Wright and Nibley, as "*sophic and mantic*." Wright calls the tension of Sophic and Mantic "a permanent conflict of spiritualities derived from the human condition itself" (51), plotting the boundary between them rather as Solzhenitsyn draws "the line dividing good

and evil . . . through the heart of every human being" (160).

Finally, though, for Wright "the either-or disjunction is definitely out" (59); and "supernaturalists have proven" that "no one can live . . . with nothing but religion . . . by demonstrating the folly [which RHC seems to embrace] of regarding our involvement with the two traditions as 'the melodrama of a war to the death between implacable foes'" (60). In the end, Wright reiterates his *conjunctive* rather than *disjunctive* view, warning that "Latter-day Saints cannot contribute significantly to . . . the critical evaluation of unbelief unless they become a *sophic* and a *mantic* people who have overcome their own lack of faith" (62). For this sentence to make sense, "*sophic*" has to mean something more than "lack of faith" or "anti-faith," though I'm not sure Wright—and still less sure RHC—is clear enough about this.

When he first introduces "the old dualism," RHC claims that "Hugh Nibley labels it as the *Mantic* versus the *Sophic*, 'two fundamentally antithetical ways of perceiving the world'" ("Attuning," 54; Nibley, 314). I've reread that page in Nibley, and a page or two on either side, as well as 413 and 414 in case of a typo, and I can't find the phrase supposedly quoted;⁵ nor have I yet found the phrase in Wright. RHC seems to want to appeal to Hugh Nibley's massive cachet as a "defender of the [orthodox?] faith." Yet Nibley does not try to harry the Sophic out of the land—that sort of campaign would be "Sophic" behavior (cf. his Propositions 5C and D [400-403]). Rather, he hoped to redress the disastrous neglect of the Mantic in the modern world and to address the hopeful signs of its reemergence. For Nibley, "Mantic thinking enjoys greater flexibility and latitude" than Sophic, though "this opens the door to all kinds of quacks and pretenders . . . who supply the Sophic with its *causa belli* and its ammunition" (404). Nibley's warfare metaphors seem mainly, as here, to describe Sophic behavior; and his Proposition 6B might describe RHC's own conduct of his supposedly "Mantic" *bellum* against his supposedly "Sophic" opponent: "In spite of its susceptibility to abuses, Mantic freewheeling has the advantage of the Sophic, which necessarily takes a posture of unshakeable integrity and undeviating rightness, thus placing its pretensions in a very vulnerable

position" (405).

Buttressing his Sophic/Mantic dichotomy, RHC makes a similar reductive move on Jeffrey C. Jacob's "Explorations in Mormon Social Character: Beyond the Liahona and Iron Rod." Dissatisfied with Richard Poll's "simplicity of a dichotomy" (44), Jacob crossed a three-phase continuum of attitudes toward "dependence" on the Spirit (which overlapped both Poll's Liahonas and Iron Rods) with a three-tiered description of "class location" to construct a "matrix" that produces "a typology of nine different kinds" (!) of Mormons (45). RHC lifts one type (or column, at most) from that matrix, Jacob's "charismatic," and equates it to "Mantic" in his reductive two-term system. Jacob's "charismatics" "see no inherent contradiction between agency and God's intimate involvement both in the trivial and profound aspects of our lives" (49). Levi Peterson's Frank Windham seems to belong to that category, though God's involvement in the trivia of Frank's life is a "descendentally transcendental travesty" (55) to RHC.

The real dynamite of Jacob's article, though, is his description of "class location" as a critical factor in the Church (51). Frank Windham, for instance, comes from the "Mormon working class" (as bwj and I did, and still do) rather than "the Entrepreneurial Right" or "the Corporate Center" (51). (Wayne belongs to the lazy, undeserving poor.) For Jacob, the latter two categories "define the ethos of the contemporary Church" (55). His description of the worldview of the "Entrepreneurial Right" does make me shudder:

The essence of the Entrepreneurial Right's worldview is an idealized direct relationship between work and success. Individual failure, if and when it comes, results from moral deficiencies. . . . In the entrepreneurs' opinion, the poor are victims of their own ineptitude, just as affluence is secured by ingenuity and diligence. Since one's status is earned . . . no one is under moral obligation to share surplus beyond perfunctory charity. There is no "free lunch," and little exasperates the Entrepreneurs more profoundly than the possibility that someone might enjoy a measure of material reward, e.g., welfare, without effort comparable to their own.

The Entrepreneurial Right's moral certitude masks the inherent precariousness of their status. They possess few guarantees. The entrepreneurs must rise early tomorrow, and all the mornings thereafter, to maintain and marginally advance their relative advantage. (55)

That "essence" might account for how RHC comes to view a Mormon writer like Levi Peterson or a Mormon critic like bwj as not participating in the "ethos" of Mormonism. Thanks but no thanks.

Given the ninefold tic-tac-toe grid Jacob draws on Mormon socio-religious terrain, I think it's not helpful—or faithful—either to the subcommunity of Mormon literary discourse or to the larger community of the Church, to parlay the reductive polarity of Sophic and Mantic into cartoon stereotypes of "orthodox" and "liberal" that explicitly locate the one "at the center of the faith" (52) and thus implicitly marginalize (or even violently scapegoat) the other.

RHC risks a somewhat condescending and "essentialist" portrait of the Mormon audience he and I both think we should serve. Do they "resemble our own believing and innocent former selves—the selves we shelved in the cause of the worldly philosophies" (52)? I don't think "the orthodox Latter-day Saints" are all that innocent, all that similar to one another, or all that dissimilar from RHC or bwj, no matter what universities they have or have not gone to. RHC declares that what "makes them orthodox" (assuming they are, whatever that means) and puts them "at the center of the faith," putting somebody else at the margin, is that these "ecclesiastically active Saints are more or less rooted in essences of spirituality" (52). At one point it looks as if the un-rooted Sophics are the people who have learned to read and write and criticize, while the Mantics, the orthodox Saints, are "inarticulate . . . and busy doing their Home Teaching—and making faithful statements that pain the Sophics" (55). His binary opposition is unhelpfully disputatious, and his characterization of the good guys risks condescension.

Still, RHC's description of the "orthodox," as it develops, does portray them as less simply "believing and innocent" than he first declared them to be: "inconsistent, foible-ridden, groping men and women, who nevertheless differ . . . through 'the gift of the Holy Ghost'" (52) and so on. These charismatic orthodox and central Mormons

expect the presence of the Godhead in their lives; they believe in the literal reality of God as a sensate, corporeal being who lives on the planet nearest Kolob; and they believe in Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, the Creator of earth and the Savior of humankind. . . . Latter-day

Saints believe that the Father and his Son *can* and *may* and *do* intervene in mortal lives—and may do so momentarily—to assist mortals in their individual and collective courses. (52-53)

Amen and amen.

But isn't that about what happens to "inconsistent, foible-ridden, and groping" Frank Windham at that urinal? I just don't get it, I guess. A Mormon writer (granted, a coffee-drinking, non-temple-going, but still garment-wearing, church-attending, home-teaching, and sometimes high priests' group-teaching one, who sleeps in sacrament meeting and writes about it) writes a novel whose protagonist seems literally to believe God lives "up on the royal star of Kolob" (253), and in which Jesus appears in cowboy garb astride a horse, complete with sack of Bull Durham and rolling a smoke, to this struggler who desperately needs assistance in his course, and gives him some useful and even saving counsel, culminating in "And work on that crap about hating God. See if you can get over it" (356)—and this Mormon critic calls it a "*deus ex machina* vision" and a "profanation of Christ." "Profane" means "outside the shrine"; but that is just where I thought RHC said charismatic Mormons expect God to intervene, in their actual secular and messed-up lives. This moment is rather precisely a "descendentally transcendental travesty" ("Attuning," 55): Jesus arrives re-clothed or disguised (tra-vestied) as a cowboy, and he definitely "descends" here, as the scriptures say; "transcendental" strikes a right positive note, though the entire phrase sounds strongly pejorative. Oddly, too, it's okay for Scott Card to present a "sincere and profane Heber C. Kimball" (56) in his novel *Saints*. And Eileen G. Kump (Wayne's first creative writing teacher, who taught him to value honest sensory detail) can write a technically similar "vision" to end a story, and RHC will call it "an *essential* moment" and "a wonderfully Mormon *coup de force*" (56). Wayne and I like that moment, too, and I suspect its immediate recognizability to many Mormons owes something to "Man's Search for Happiness"—and maybe farther back, Wayne sez, to Nephi Anderson. But how is it not a *maritus ex machina*?

RHC writes of the "shock" his "orthodox" readers felt when they encountered "the grotesque God of Frank [Windham]'s strange, quasi-Calvinis-

tic—but decidedly not LDS—theology" (55).⁶ Well, yes, exactly: does he think Gene England or I—or even Wayne—do not register the same shock? I would ask just what it is in the novel that invites bwj or Gene England or RHC to make such a judgment: Levi Peterson's implicit theology—the "core of norms" that is the "implied author"⁷—in *The Backslider*, which judges Frank's "penitential" aberration, is much more normatively Mormon. So what's the problem? Still, it's true, Wayne sez—you can check it in experience—that significant numbers of western American Mormons are troubled by something like that grotesque God, that penitential impulse. Wayne recently passed on to me a Samizdat copy (which he sez the Angel Moroni delivered to him) of quasi-official "Counseling Suggestions for Priesthood Leaders" on "Helping Someone Overcome a Masturbation Problem." Its last few pages, "A Guide to Self Control," recommend, among other things, "think[ing] of having to bathe in a tub of worms, and eat[ing] several of them as you do the act"; and "in very severe cases . . . to tie a hand to the bed frame with a tie" or "wearing several layers of clothing which would be difficult to remove while half asleep" (3). It's only about one psychological and technological step from this to Frank Windham's "little contraption made from two buckskin gloves, which were sewed together at the fingertips and joined at the wrists by a leather band with a buckle . . . to keep him from masturbating in his sleep" (329). And that figure of a stern and punishing God (especially about sex) can be derived by guiltily or punitively misreading (Wayne sez he's done this) the writings of at least one other Mormon from down around Snowflake, Arizona, if the late Spencer W. Kimball's views of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and of the Woman Taken in Adultery may be held in evidence (165, 307-11).

RHC urges Mormon writers and Mormon critics to address "orthodox" Mormon readers or "Saint . . . through LDS metaphors" (53). But how many of his own metaphors, from his subtitle through St. Nick (52), Odysseus bound to the mast (54), and Cinderella (55), on to the "ladder leaning against the wrong wall" (55) can be called "Mormon"? "Stemming the . . . Tide,"⁸ for instance, did not originate in Mor-

monism; indeed one revelation to Joseph Smith uses the irresistible flow of the greatest river on our continent as a figure for God's work (D&C 121:33). If a tide really is rising, there's no hope of stemming or turning it, short of the divine intervention Joshua called down in the vale of Ajalon (Josh. 10:12-14), or Faustian engineering feats to keep the North Sea out of the Low Countries. Maybe, sez Wayne, RHC is the kid with his digit in the dike. Heroic. Yet we both also like that other Dutchman, the one in the song who's "not the kind of man to keep his thumb jammed in the dam." But unless we're the threatened Lowlands, if it really is a tide, why not wait a few hours and watch it turn? And turn again. Coastal dwellers learn to live *by* the sea, use it to live, regulate their incomings and outgoings by it. RHC's "ladder against the wrong wall" metaphor was thrice "quoted" ("I am reminded of the statement") by an LDS apostle (Packer, 275, 281, 285), but was the "ladder of success" before that (a real comedown from the Socratic ladder of love or Jacob's stairway to high heaven, sez Wayne), so it, too, can't claim "essential Mormonness." And we can always trope it again: then the walls started falling. "Trope it?" sez Wayne.

RHC's dominant metaphor for his Address was warfare, which is at least scriptural though not at all originally or exclusively "Mormon"; yet its specific terms in his Address are disturbingly historical. He says bwj "elevat[ed] to Pearl Harbor status" ("Attuning," 51) his review of *Harvest*, enacted a sneak attack on a "day that will live in infamy," etc. I'm sorry bwj's delivery of that Address made RHC feel bombed-out and sunk; and I apologize for that. But does his metaphor suggest that his Address is General Jimmy Doolittle's costly raid, or any of General Curtis LeMay's sixty firebombings of Japanese cities, or the triumphant final solution flight of the *Enola Gay*? (Wayne sez it's like Wallace Stevens said, "fictive things / Wink as they will" [59]). I thought bwj did try to be careful of his metaphors, and the main metaphor he intended, in keeping with the occasion of an AML Annual Awards Luncheon, was the metaphor of hospitality and table-talk. He meant to make it real, too. He had no bombs, no Zeroes.

To suggest that "Mormon metaphors" might somehow unmistakably mark a literary work as "exuding" "essential Mormonness" ("Attuning," 53-

54) hardly solves the problem of identifying "Mormon literature": it's just the same problem over again, though perhaps in a simpler or even naked form: What's a Mormon metaphor? One task of Mormon writers indeed might be to find new metaphors, or rediscover lost ones, in unexpected "things," that do "bear record" of Christ. A vision of a cowboy Jesus in a church basement urinal that will flush into the same drain as the baptismal font? Well, why not? Stranger things happen in prophetic and apocalyptic scriptures. Not to mention in real life, sez Wayne.

Suppose I largely agree with RHC that "we who are Mormon writers, critics, and publishers . . . must speak to [the Saints] through LDS metaphors" ("Attuning," 53): this after all would be a way to be "faithful" to our community. But might one do that better by invoking Pearl Harbor or by invoking Abraham's welcome to strangers? I don't ask a writer, even a Mormon writer or critic, to speak to me only in metaphors I already know. The Mormon reader who says "That is not what I meant at all" ("Attuning," 54) to the poem or story of a Mormon writer has it right *and* wrong. If we already know a metaphor, it's a cliché; for it to work *as* metaphor, we must already know one or both of its terms, but their metaphoric junction must be "new," must "surprise" or even "shock" us. This restates the large point of bwj's Address: if as a reader I insist that a writer "reflect a worldview with which [I] can identify" (54)—which I can immediately and comfortably receive as "the same" as the one I already hold—then why read at all? The point is that a story is *not about me*, "is not what I meant" but what *somebody else* meant; to hear any news at all, I must let the stranger say.

RHC seems to say that bwj's and mine and Wayne's trouble—the trouble of "Latter-day Saint writers and critics"—when we say we want to hear some other voice than our own, is that we "want to have [our] faith and doubt it, too" ("Attuning," 54). Well, yes, though it's not a case of "want to," we just *do*. Hasn't RHC read Alma 32:18, 21, 26, 34 and Ether 3:19? We can have "faith" only about something we do not know; when we know, we have "faith no longer" in that thing, nor can we doubt it. Faith is not to know; and these scriptures oppose knowledge to both faith and doubt. If we're wrong

about this, someone please show us, with patient and long-suffering persuasion, how to get it right.

I cautiously agree with RHC that a Mormon critic's challenge, "when acting as" such, is "to read and critique LDS writing with eyes of faith, with feet firm-set in Mormon metaphors" ("Attuning," 56). I disagree on how and what those eyes of faith (not eyes of doctrine) see, on what those metaphors are, though my feet are as stuck in them as anybody's. I say the eyes of faith are, alas, also eyes of doubt until they know, and then they no longer have faith. I say there is more than one Mormon metaphor; and I'll venture now to suggest that a good Mormon critic, like a good Mormon writer, will invent—i.e., cause to "come in"—new metaphors, or revive old ones we've discarded or forgotten. That's what bwj thought he was up to. He thought his ideas, his sentences, his discourse conducted on the ground of the ancient and scriptural metaphor and reality of welcoming the stranger at the gate into the household of faith, might help.

What RHC's "for or against" view of fiction and his ideological, "defender of the faith" style of criticism lead to is shown in his *Pillar of Light* review, which stresses that "Lund's kind of faithful fiction" is

at odds with our *fin-de-siècle* real and fictional mentality, devoid as it often is of transcendent meaning or suggestion of divine control or intervention and favoring as it does "minimalist" depictions of unshaped and unresolved lives, lives without transcendent purpose or meaning or the willingness to see possibilities for conclusions ("closure") in the human condition. (79)

Transcendent meaning and closure, it would seem, are "faithful." But in a religion that teaches the radical agency of all persons, their co-eternality with God, and the prospect of endless life, is that necessarily so? I'm not so sure, and thus not so sure that "Such literature [i.e., contemporary fiction] is certainly a philosophical remove from the belief in an all-knowing Heavenly Father, whose *work* and *glory* . . . is to 'bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man' (Moses 1:39)" (79). Eternal life sounds like openness, not closure, to me.

For pleasure and edification, Wayne sez why don't I read you a depiction of some "unshaped and unresolved lives"? Being "minimalist," it won't take long. Its title is "Weekend."

The game was called on account of dogs—Hunter in the infield, Tucker in the infield, Bosco and Boone at first base. First-grader Donald was down on second base, and Kirsten grabbed her brother's arm and wouldn't let him leave third to make his first run.

"Unfair!" her brother screamed, and the dogs, roving umpires, ran to third.

"Good power!" their uncle yelled, when Joy, in a leg cast, swung the bat and missed. "Now put some wood to it."

And when she did, Joy's designated runner, Cousin Zeke, ran to first, the ice cubes in his gin and tonic clacking like dog tags in the glass.

And when Kelly broke free from Kirsten and this time came in to make the run, members of the Kelly team made Tucker in the infield dance on his hind legs.

"It's not who wins—" their coach began, and was shouted down by one of the boys, "There's first and there's forget it."

Then Hunter retrieved a foul ball and carried it off in the direction of the river.

The other dogs followed—barking, mutinous.

Dinner was a simple picnic on the porch, paper plates in laps, the only conversation a debate as to which was the better grip for throwing shoes.

After dinner, the horseshoes were handed out, the post pounded in, the rules reviewed with a new rule added due to falling-down shorts. The new rule: Have attire.

The women smoked on the porch, the smoke repelling mosquitoes, and the men and children played on even after dusk when it got so dark that a candle was rigged to balance on top of the post, and was knocked off and blown out by every single almost-ringer.

Then the children went to bed, or at least went upstairs, and the men joined the women for a cigarette on the porch, absently picking ticks engorged like grapes off the sleeping dogs. And when the men kissed the women good night, and their weekend whiskers scratched the women's cheeks, the women did not think shave, they thought: stay. (Hempel, 28)

Subtracting if you wish the gin and the cigarette

smoke (but then how would he keep the mosquitoes at bay?), Wayne sez he wishes to God he'd written that story, and I think if he had he'd have done as fine a thing for "Mormon fiction" as any writer or critic might conceive. Wayne sez even without the gin and smokes, he bets the *Ensign* would never publish it.

Despite my sense that I clearly disagree with RHC, these are still seriously open questions for me, and particularly for Wayne as a writer who wants to write fiction about contemporary Mormon domestic life, and does not want to write didactic fiction. For one thing, besides Sacks's theory about authorial beliefs in nondidactic fictions, which leads him to imply that writing a novel (as "represented action" not satire or apologue) does not oblige the writer to "make insincere judgments" (68; see also 258, 262, 271-72) and besides the testimony of Scott Card that, even if he would, he cannot keep his Mormon beliefs from operating in his fiction (92, 158-59),⁹ Wayne has in mind as he approaches writing fiction the witness of D. H. Lawrence that the novel is "incapable of the absolute" (179), of Flannery O'Connor that fiction is "closest to man in his sin and his suffering and his hope" and "escapes any orthodoxy we might set up for it, because its dignity is an imitation of our own, based like our own on free will" (192), and of Milan Kundera that "the world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances" and that in a novel "a dogmatic thought turns hypothetical" (14, 79).

Wayne and I believe Lawrence, O'Connor, and Kundera are right, historically and ontologically, about nondidactic fiction as "represented action" or, in Kundera's phrase, as "meditative interrogation" of human existence (31). But if so, is RHC then right also? Is didactic fiction the only possible "faithful fiction"? Will a novel (as understood by Lawrence and Kundera) always necessarily be "unfaithful" because it cannot be didactic?

We hope not. Yet Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the novel as a "heteroglot, multivoiced" or "dialogic" genre in which no single ("authentic") voice is singularly privileged (259-422, esp. 265, 275, 364, 410) sustains the deep question that RHC's defini-

tion of "faithful fiction" raises for Mormon writers, whether in flesh and blood and spirit they are faithful members or not. Sophic or Mantic, "orthodox" or not (on anybody's terms), any Mormon writer entering the long work of writing a novel in the sense of the term I've accepted here must run the risk of what Tony Tanner (echoing Bakhtin, I believe) says "in its origin, might almost be said to be a transgressive mode" (3). One other voice that may help us here is that of Reynolds Price, who has said that "east and west, the novel . . . has traditionally been an instrument of reason intended for discovery and comprehension and then, of necessity, forgiveness—in fact, the supremely Christian form" (30). Perhaps "forgiveness" is possible only in a space where any "dogmatic thought turns hypothetical," a space "incapable of the absolute." Still, we don't know how we answer this question—and won't until Wayne finally hunkers down and writes his own novel and sees what happens (scary thought). Maybe even then we won't.

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NOTES

1. The successive AML Presidential Addresses from January 1991 and January 1992, bwj's "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let The Stranger Say," and RHC's "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide," appeared side by side in *Sunstone* 16.5 (July 1993): 40-50, 51-57 and in the *AML Annual 1994*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1994), 1:19-33, 34-43. These characters' other pertinent publications will be cited below.

2. He may have derived the first term from Richard Bushman's "Faithful History," though fiction seems a more problematic category. The second term bwj had used as the title of a review of *The Canyons of Grace* by Levi Peterson, a word for unbranded fiction, rather free-ranging and hard to corral.

3. See "Herself Moving Beside Herself, Out There Alone: The Shape of Mormon Belief in Virginia Sorensen's *The Evening and the Morning*," *Dialogue* 13.3 (Fall 1980): 43-60. Oddly, RHC does not cite this essay in his address, though he responded to its first presentation at the AML Symposium in 1979, an early occasion in our long-running "quarrel" about Mormon literature.

4. James said, "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*" (17), and later, "I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticise your music" (18).

5. The phrase "two antithetical and hostile views of life" does occur much later in the essay (342). And Nibley does say "the two are totally incompatible" and warns, "It is when one seeks to combine or reconcile

the Sophic and the Mantic that trouble begins" (316). Nibley's term for that "trouble" is "Sophistic," and it is just possible that most Mormon literary discourse (rhetoric) takes place in that "shrine." RHC's elision of that third term keeps his battleground neatly demarcated but perhaps also prevents both combatants from discovering where either actually stands. Nibley's dichotomous language in these pages does not seem to me to square with what I have thought I understood as the idea that the Mantic does not at all deny the "reality" that the Sophic claims is *all*, but rather the Mantic includes that reality in its view and also *expects* something more. ("Expectation" is a key word in Nibley's discussion [e.g., 314].) For his part, Wright emphasizes, "These conflicting world views . . . are not the simple opposites of one another. The Judeo-Christian view is perforce inclusionary . . . because no one can believe in a supernatural order that transcends the natural order without also believing in the natural order" (53).

6. I'm assuming that he refers to the God Frank has tried to strike a bargain with on page one of the novel, not the cowboy Jesus at the end who rides in like the cavalry to the rescue.

7. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961): 73-74.

8. "Sophic tide" appears to be an unacknowledged borrowing from Nibley, who finds in our own time a "trend toward the Mantic . . . so broad and strong as to suggest a reversal of the Sophic tide of 600 B.C." (361).

9. I've heard Card make the same statement on several occasions at BYU over the last fifteen years, most recently in 1995.

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Utah Women Writers and the Utah Renaissance: The Geography of the Heart

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What the Prophet hadn't seemed to understand somehow, came into Linnea's mind, was human nature. Women's human nature, that is. The only way polygamy would really work like he meant was for one ugly repulsive old man with about a million dollars or five million dollars to marry a bunch of women that didn't care anything about a man anyway and were tickled to death that he didn't get ideas in his head and want to sleep with them every night, a bunch of women that merely wanted to be supported and not have to work. Of course, even then they'd be mean and jealous, that was how women were. They would always want more clothes and more of everything than the others had, also they would want this repulsive old man to like them best, even if they couldn't stand him, just to show the other wives a thing or two. The Prophet Joseph—in fact, all men chosen by the Lord to sit down and think out religious matters—didn't take into consideration human nature. (Kennelly, *Peaceable*, 94)

In *New England Local Color Literature*, Josephine Donovan identifies what she calls that "other American Renaissance" (13), a counter-tradition to both the sentimental-domestic convention which had been the acceptable domain of what Hawthorne called "that damned mob of scribbling women" and the mainstream of American literature flowering with Hawthorne himself. But thanks to the pioneering works of such women critics as Elaine Showalter (in *A Literature of Their Own*), Ellen Moers (*Literary Women*), Josephine Donovan, and others, it has become clear that women writers have a tradition of their own, separate from men's. While all women writers do not necessarily work in this tradition, there are many who do.

Furthermore, this tradition, a woman-centered and woman-identified realism, manifests itself most obviously in what we have come to call regional writing. Utah women writers Maurine Whipple, Virginia Sorensen, and Ardyth Kennelly constitute

one such tradition. Like their New England sisters such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sarah Orne Jewett, their Southern sisters such as Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, and their Midwestern sisters such as Jessamyn West and Ruth Suckow, Whipple, Sorensen, and Kennelly belong to a generation of artists born of pioneer stock, mindful of its legacy, and critical of its future.

In each section of this country, then, and certainly no less so than in Utah, a body of literature has emerged that deals with woman-centered and woman-identified moral dilemmas. In short, these Utah women writers have, like others, found their own metaphor for survival in the "masculine wilderness." And this metaphor is vastly different from the male, and therefore mainstream, metaphor. American women writers who belong to this tradition have, like their male counterparts, turned frequently to geography as metaphor. But, unlike their male counterparts, their geographical metaphors are less vast and more physically limited. Where a man might make a mountain a metaphor, a woman is inclined to use the quilt. And where a man's heroism might be seen in his conquering the mountain, the woman's is in civilizing the dug-out. The difference is, then, in what we might begin by calling a geography of the home and eventually come to call, because the home is the nucleus of civilization, a geography of the heart.

By contributing to a coherent, feminine, literary tradition, Maurine Whipple, Virginia Sorensen, and Ardyth Kennelly changed the dimensions of Utah writing. They were all natives of their state, granddaughters of founding families, well-educated, and reared within the rigid social and religious (and therefore male) mores of their region. Each of them was an avid reader, story-teller, and outspoken critic

of convention. And each of them, because of her intense and immediate identification with female family role-models, turned away from a literature that proselytized to a literature that criticized by turning to her grandmother's generation for material. It is precisely in this sense that they represent a regional renaissance, a return to those original sources out of which their contemporary values had come. Because this renaissance came from a feminine literary tradition, it meant a return to (or rather a turning to) woman as focus in fiction.

And in Utah this invariably meant addressing the moral dilemma of polygamy from a woman's point of view. To do this, each had to deal with the conflict of the heart that began as a conflict in the home and ended in a remarkable resolution: that polygamy, whether theologically sound or not, is unexpectedly liberating. That is, when a woman cannot be in possession of a man, she can only be in possession of herself. As Linnea, in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, so neatly puts it:

"Oh, you numbskull, Olaf, . . . You don't understand. You don't see what I mean. Maybe pretty near everybody has to give up what they love best, sometime or other in their lives, so they can have it back." (115)

Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* is told against the backdrop of the ceaseless battle to harness the Virgin River, which for the male characters symbolizes the entire struggle with a remote and inhospitable wilderness. As Edward Geary, in his essay "Women Regionalists of Mormon Country," has pointed out, ". . . the building of a permanent dam, at the novel's end, symbolizes the threat of internal corruption and conflict that menaces the body of the community even as the water corrupts the innards of those who must drink it" (148). But we must remember that the novel is not just about civilizing the wilderness nor internal corruption. It is principally about a woman, more specifically about her place in a masculine wilderness and a patriarchal town.

Clory, the novel's protagonist, is the third polygamous wife of Abijah. She has been married both against her will and against her passion to the man who raised her while his first wife, who was essentially Clory's mother, is expected to adjust. That

Clory is only half of Bathsheba's age, much prettier, and unfettered by the cares of motherhood is not supposed to matter to the first wife. But it does; and she exacts a terrible price, and one that only a woman can fully understand: Clory's first baby girl. Lest you think this uncommon and therefore unrealistic, it was common practice; and Ardyth Kennelly later, in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, creates a character who suffers the same fate. But a writer who understands women cannot leave it at that, and both Whipple and Kennelly contrive, one through a sort of witchcraft and the other through "divine" intervention, to leave the babies in the hands of their biological mothers.

So it would seem that polygamy, whether or not it is God's plan, is not woman's: it results in both unnatural and unholy consequences. In *The Giant Joshua*, when men intervene in women's affairs, when they step from their masculine wilderness into the territory of the home and heart, they create rather than solve problems. For example, witness the death of Clory's friend and Abijah's second wife in childbirth because, and only because, a male rule concerning childbirth is carried out. Witness the death of all three of Clory's children while her husband is away on a mission.

Clory, then, is like Sorensen's women—"in the middle," a free spirit who must strain against the discipline of blind obedience and a woman of whom obedience makes extraordinary demands. But, as Edward Geary has pointed out, she resists the demands of both social and religious communities and the appeal of freedom "to die in harness, abandoned by those she would not abandon" (148). At the close of the novel we see a Clory who is like the Bathsheba of the beginning. Abijah has taken yet another wife, one half Clory's age, and has left her alone again, this time to die in the singularly anguished solitude of childbirth.

As Geary points out, when the community has the importance that it has historically possessed in Mormon country, when obedience is valued more than individuality, when the Clory MacIntyres lay down their lives for a system they do not believe in and over which they have no control, the role of the independent-minded individual within the community is revealing. Like Whipple, both Sorensen and Kennelly create women protagonists caught in the

middle, in the crossfire between community and conscience. Sorensen's Kate in *The Evening and the Morning* and Zina in *Many Heavens* are only two of her characters whose insistence on self-identification confuses the community and costs the characters dearly. But, unlike Clory, Sorensen's characters confront the moral dilemma of polygamy after the Manifesto, like Hester Prynne answering to a higher authority than either church or state.

In Sorensen, what the patriarchal community calls God's plan before 1890, it calls adultery after. If the system orders it, the practice is sanctified and institutionalized; but if the individual requires the practice while the system doesn't sanction it, the case is different. In short, what got a woman to heaven before now earns her hell.

In Zina, in *Many Heavens*, Sorensen creates a "high spirited woman of eminent good sense and practicality yet in whose nature spontaneous sentiment has found out a vein of poetry" (Geary, 3). Zina tells her story in realistic, colloquial fashion: she has fallen in love with, become a sort of wife to, Dr. Nielsen, whose wisdom and serenity find no conflict in a post-Manifesto polygamy of the spirit. The town, of course, is horrified, but Zina reminds us that she must "put [their] story down . . . put the record straight . . . [because] too much truth is lost in this world, with the scandal remembered" (7). Zina's singular love for Niels makes believable their remarkable resolution to the problem of Niels, his wife, and Zina. Because Niels has made a commitment to his wife, he will honor it, though she is both sexually and emotionally dead. Because Zina has loved Niels, he will honor her and return her love, because the two of them are both sexually and emotionally alive. The truth is, then, that in opting for polygamy, these characters, while in clear violation of community, civil, and religious law, demonstrate that there are many possibilities and many heavens. The irony is that a woman, after the Manifesto, chooses polygamy. The very institution that kills Clory and that she entered against her will, saves Zina when she willingly embraces it.

In Kate, in *The Evening and the Morning*, Sorensen gives us a woman who, like herself, has no respect for hypocrisy or self-righteousness, no respect for the patriarchal institutionalization of woman-centered moral dilemmas. Kate, like Zina, finds libera-

tion, self-realization, and, as a consequence, self-possession in sharing a man with another woman. Like Zina, Kate does not think it the best of all possible arrangements; but like Zina, Kate knows that this is not the best of all possible worlds. In Kate's case, the situation is more publicly horrifying: at a time more remote from the Manifesto than *Many Heavens*, Kate bears an illegitimate child, Dessie. Dessie, like Kate, struggles with the system—she from within and Kate from without. Perhaps here it is principally Jean, Dessie's daughter, who is the woman in the middle. She has much of Kate and her lover in her, but so does Dessie who strains against the temptations of disobedience. At the close of this novel, set in a biblical framework, it is the end of the sixth day, and Kate must now rest and look at her work. She finds, in the interplay of three generations of women writhing within and rebelling against a system outside their control, that:

It was very good. . . . Perhaps our old allegories were not so bad, after all. Each one making what order he could from his own chaos. . . . There had been a woman and she had loved a man and through this love men and loves were multiplied. Perhaps one traveled in a great circle from love to love, first receiving and taking comfort only, as a child does, and finally coming to the love given to another child and no longer received. And behold, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day, morning after evening so one would never make the mistake of thinking anything ended without also a new beginning. (341)

Like Whipple and Sorensen, Ardyth Kennelly, the most seriously neglected of the Utah women writers, creates in Linnea a woman who confronts the issue of plural marriage head-on as the second wife. But unlike Whipple, who is downright bitter, and Sorensen, who is often somber, Kennelly is gloriously funny, proving that there's more than one tone to criticism. The contrast here in tone is important because Whipple is more often dismissed for her anger than for any other cause. I have been very much concerned about and frequently advised against applying such terms as *feminist* and *feminism* to the study of women writers in Utah. Unfortunately, the term connotes for too many readers the notion of open warfare. By *feminist*, I simply mean a worldview that acknowledges and values the uniquely

female virtues and attributes and the extent to which a patriarchal system denies them. Hence, a feminist is essentially any woman or man who lives by principles resulting from an understanding of those ways in which women are different from and those ways in which women are like men but who does not seek to establish a ruling gender.

Having said all that, I want to acknowledge how angry a novel *The Giant Joshua* really is. And in this way, Whipple is vastly different from both Sorensen and Kennelly. But the essentially common ground is that all three women deal with a patriarchal system. As Carolyn Heilbrun points out in "Women Writers: Coming of Age at 50," women writers have much to fear in expressing their sense of society's deprivation of women:

[There is] the ridicule, misery and anxiety this patriarchy holds in store for those who express their anger about the enforced destiny of women. Even today, after two decades of feminism, young women shy away from an emphatic statement of anger at patriarchy.

It is worth noting that the anger inherent in *The Giant Joshua* does not, of itself, make it a better or a worse novel than any of the others. Anger is only one way to "rage against disesteem," as James Baldwin puts it. Perhaps the reason Sorensen and Kennelly are not angry is that they, like Baldwin, believe that while "the rage of the disesteemed is inevitable, it is also personally fruitless" and Whipple does not.

Kennelly's *Peaceable Kingdom* and *Up Home* are also the most completely woman-centered novels. In the community, Linnea is mother, midwife, child psychologist, social worker, friend, companion, confidante, gerontologist, confessor, and priest. She is Solomon-like in her resolution of the adopted baby case, knowing that the quickest and surest route to resolution is to invoke the authority of the very person who created the problem—the president of the Mormon Church.

The Bishop said the Lord's Will would be done, and not a person there doubted it. Linnea thought again modestly that her supplication had done no hurt, thought again shamelessly that not only had it done no hurt, it had very possibly turned the trick. But she put the notion away as big-headed, at the same time feeling a warmth of gratitude at her heart as soft and light as an omelette.

No more than she would have told Olaf when he did her bidding, that it was her idea, would she have told the Lord about this. All she said to Him was, as she would have said to Olaf: You had a fine idea. You did the right thing. (*Peaceable*, 160)

She is Christ-like in her dispensation of all religious sacraments. She presides at births that lead to baptism; she comforts the sick and buries the dead; she administers the sacrament of adulthood to the young and witnesses their marriages; she provides a literal communion as well as a spiritual one, seeing even to the division of the family's share of bread to all who come to her table; and finally she hears the confession of Mrs. Troon, whose resolution of the polygamy problem was to be sealed to two husbands. Linnea's conclusions about all this are simple, direct, delightful, and profound. About the revelation to end polygamy, she says to her husband Olaf:

"That's a pretty no-account way for God to do. Change his mind like that. . . . God wanted it, and then he don't want it no more. Took a notion not to want it no more like a doggoned spoiled young one that hollers for something.... God's got little to do, that's all I can say. President Woodruff's got little to do! The Counsellors got little to do! All you no-good busybody no account men got little to do. . . . I'm mad enough to chew nails. It makes perfect fools out of all us women that trotted right along doing the doggone men's bidding like we don't have sense." (*Peaceable*, 254)

About the Manifesto, she says:

It was all very well to come out flat-footed and say the good or ill experiment was over—fine, jake, all right—no more plural marriages, one consort for one consort like the noble penguin and staunch Presbyterian. But what in Heaven's name did one do with the leftovers, the extra wives and extra offspring by the baker's dozen? (*Up*, 15-16)

About her coffee-drinking, Linnea says God never intended the Swedes for in the coffee part of the Word of Wisdom. About Olaf's hospitalization after a woman lands on him from the top floor of the ZCMI building, she says, "It ain't enough that you got two of 'em already to contend with here on earth. That ain't enough, My, no. They got to jump down on you out of the clear blue sky" (*Up*, 376). But in the end, Linnea concludes that regardless of

how fouled up it had all gotten here on earth, "heaven would have to go some, to hold a candle to this life" (*Up*, 315)

Kennelly's Linnea is a remarkable creation who, as center of the real community, the community of heart and home, a community over which, by right, women ought to legislate morally, heals the physically, spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally broken. She saves countless lives as midwife; she returns people to their faith with her funny but flawless logic; she welcomes the "novel reader" into her home and accepts an invitation in return, thus extending the arms of the community to the intellectually different. And finally, she helps to end dangerous marriages, as in the case of her neighbor, who, after giving birth in the World Room at the temple dedication, is threatened by her husband; and she heals marriages which, while fraught with problems, are healthy, as in the case of Olaf and his first wife. Linnea is the ultimate "woman in the middle," unable to put herself first and unable to take herself too seriously. When defeat knocks on her door, she just isn't home.

She, too, concludes that all is well. Linnea observes that perhaps polygamy wasn't so bad after all. After all, if it weren't good for man to be alone, polygamy certainly solved that problem. And if women were the fit and proper helpmates of men, why, women didn't need the help of any more than one man, but some men needed the help of a mighty lot of women.

Whipple, Sorensen, and Kennelly, then, are significant forces in the shaping of Utah literature. In turning to their grandmothers' generation for material, they turned to a geography not of conquest but of cultivation. With a woman at the center of the novel, they delineate the problem of women making a moral decision in a world that is chiefly men's. They teach us through their characters that women ought best to leave the taming of a vast but limited wilderness outside the home to men and dedicate themselves instead to the humanizing of the physically limited but spiritually infinite realm of the heart. The woman who does might, like Kennelly's Linnea, produce a daughter who, like Gertrude, can defend even Eve. "After all, the world was only part of the time a horrible place. Sometimes it was the comfortable place she knew as home."

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Mary Bennion Powell: Polygamy and Silence

John Bennion

In the spring of 1902 Mary Bennion (later Powell) discovered that her father had married a young woman, the belle of the town, nearly a decade after the Manifesto. In her mind he had broken not only the laws of the land and heaven, but all the rules of romantic, tender courtesy a husband owes a wife. While her journal is silent concerning her father's polygamous marriages, Mary recorded her reaction in a personal essay, "The End of Childhood," and in an unfinished novel, "A Utah Idyll."

Her first of twenty-three journals begins: "Mary Bennion born on the Canaan Farm, Taylorsville Utah, January 11, 1890. . . . I am eleven years old and am in the fourth grade" (1). As her father instructed her, she proceeds to make a record of her acts—evidence of a life well spent. The record shows that she shouldered tremendous responsibilities for a girl her age. During the first year of her journal, she records that she caught a horse and hooked up, tramped a load of hay, made yeast, put on a "boil of meat," rendered some tallow, churned and molded the butter, took provisions to sheep camp, branded and docked sheep, helped make fence, went berrying, stoned cherries, herded the stock, made a fire, picked currants, washed pans to strain milk, picked prunes, picked up potatoes, dressed the children, harnessed the horses, hitched a horse to the running gear of a wagon, hooked up the horse, made a pen wiper, cleaned chickens, milked and did chores, got kindling, dressed the baby, and peeled pears for preserves. Sometimes, perhaps tired of detailing her acts, she simply writes, "Worked around." She also camped with her family, looked at a total eclipse of the moon with a spy glass, and danced to guitar and mouth organ.

The record made in 1901 seems a complete description of her life; but at age fifty-nine, in January 1949, she made the following entry across the blank endpaper at the front of the journal:

Rereading my journal fills me with mixed emotions, fond affection for my family, astonishment that I had to work so much harder than any of the friends of my childhood, even though my father was wealthy when I was growing up; amusement at my simplicity; pity at my helplessness—at the helplessness of humanity in general; grief at my father's torturing my mother with his polygamous life, and painful shivers up and down my spine as I recognize my faithful reproduction of the Eliza R. Snow eloquence.¹

Then on the next page she explains why she wrote a journal which contains no introspective wandering, only a list of acts:

This diary (as well as all other diaries I have written—perhaps I should just say all diaries) needs a great deal of explanation. I will do some of it but it would take the knowledge of an Omniscient God to explain it properly. I will do the best I can without such help—at least for the present.

First I will say that the journaling or diary writing habit was inculcated in the lives of his children by the Utah pioneer John E. Bennion. His son Heber passed it on to his children. When we were given little black bound note-books, one Christmas, our father instructed us in their use. He said we should write in them every day, all the work we did, and all the meetings we attended, and the church duties we did. As we had been trained from babyhood to blind obedience to his every word, we automatically, and mechanically, carried out his instructions. Thus our diaries were reasonable facsimiles of his, and his father's. All the most important incidents of our lives, thus, live only in our memories. Our journals might be those of any of thousands of orthodox members of the Mormon Church. We didn't even record the fact that our father was a polygamist, with three wives,—our mother the first one. Or that we had, throughout the years, acquired eight half brothers and sisters; even though these facts conditioned our lives more than anything else that has ever happened to any of us. Births, deaths, marriages, riches, poverty, sickness, war, depression, all these things put together do not count at all, in our struggle for happiness, when compared to the fact that father was a polygamist. (verso of p. 1)

In the same adult handwriting of 1949, she lists her father's marriages: Susan Winters, Sep. 1885; Emma Jane Webster, 1900; and the last, Mary Bringhurst, April 1901. The name Mary Bringhurst is scribbled over, with "Mistake here" (2), written to the side. Was the mistake her father's act of marriage? Was Mary prompted to cross out the name as a way of denying it happened?

This first journal, written in the round cursive of a child, records her acts between March 1901 and March 1906 but mentions nothing about her discovery in 1902 of her father's polygamous marriage. She ends the journal entry dated Monday, December 23, 1901, with "We put up the Christmas tree to-night" (42). In the next entry—dated Saturday, February 1, 1902—she writes, "I thought it would be of little use to write my journal for the last few months because I did the same thing nearly every day" (42).

After her hiatus, which was actually slightly more than a month, she writes steadily until Saturday, February 29, ending that day's entry with the words, "Then I did my chores" (50). In the lower margin is written, in the handwriting of an adult,

Jan. 1949—My half-sister Susie [the first child of Mary Bringhurst] was born on Feb. 19th, 1902. Yet I did not even know my father had other wives than my mother till months after Susie was born. When I found it out I wanted to die. (50)

While she records her strong reaction years later, at the time of the discovery some time in the spring, she wrote nothing—not even her daily record of work.

Her next entry, marked only "Wed." with "May 1902" written above as a heading, is "I will start my journal again" (51). The entry immediately following that entry is headed Sep. 1902, Mon. 29: "I think I am starting my journal for sure this time" (51). She describes their month-long summer camping trip to the canyon above Holladay. She describes her mother's sickness—"She has been sick for about a week" (54). Emma-Jane Webster, not identified in the journal as her father's second wife, comes to tend Mary's mother, the first wife. Mary then describes a total eclipse of the moon, which occurred Friday, October 16. She records nothing about the discovery of her father's other wives, which her marginal notes,

written forty-seven years later, say was central to her life. The only record of her trauma was a blank space, a silence.

While she didn't write about her father's polygamous life in her journals, she broke her silence in an eleven-page essay, "The End of Childhood" and in an unfinished, 121-page novel, "A Utah Idyll." In both the essay and the novel, the revelation of his polygamy comes on a single day during spring cleaning, just before the "Blossom-time Banquet" ("End," 1) which her father gave yearly for the stake presidency and the high council.

Several acts are common to both the memoiristic and the fictional narratives: cleaning the bathroom, finding a note from the polygamous third wife, sitting at dinner where her father reads aloud from a newspaper account of a polygamy trial, leaving the table and going upstairs with her sisters where the revelation occurs, and entering deep despair until her mother asks her to write a letter to the polygamous wife. Between and after these narrated acts, the essayist and narrator struggles to understand and interpret the events. She tries through meditation, first, to explain her puzzlement at vague feelings of something gone wrong before her discovery and, afterward, to contain her despair.

While the two narratives are nearly identical concerning what happened, the differences of interpretation are revealing. In the following section I juxtapose passages from the essay and the novel. The character in the novel is named Joan. Her father's third wife is named Mary Bringhurst in the list of family marriages in the journal, Mayme Bringhurst in the essay, and Maida Bingham in the novel.

Both the essay and the novel begin with Mary cleaning the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Both narratives establish the general uneasiness in the household. The following is taken from the essay:

All day I had worked "house-cleaning" the bathroom. I was tired, but satisfied, when the job was finished. But I wasn't thrilled. Usually spring and housecleaning were times of pleasant excitement: painters and wall paperers all over the house, clean fresh smells, everything shining from being just polished, or brand new. And afterward papa giving the "Blossom-time Banquet" to the Stake Presidency and the High Council and their wives. But things weren't the same this year. (1)

Coming home from school that day, Mary "could hear mama crying, out loud, sobbing, and sort of moaning too" (1). She tries to talk to her mother, but her mother pretends to be asleep. "My knees were shaking and I couldn't have held my head up if I had tried to. Something had been wrong at our house a long time" (1).

As the girl explores what might be wrong, her memory centers on her mother: overheard sessions behind closed doors in the parlor when their father shouts and their mother pleads; her mother singing a song that seems especially sad—"I'll try to forgive him, but I cannot forget" (2); her mother weeping as she irons her father's temple robes; a mysterious doll that appears at Christmas, complete with clothing sewed by someone secret ("no one in our family ever did hand sewing") (5). The essayist's younger self explores these events as the clues to a mystery.

The novel is more complex, building on three themes—the twelve-year-old girl's interest in monogamous romantic love, her relief at various occasions in her life when a frightening illusion was replaced by truth, and her unhappiness with her father's aggressive temper. At first she describes the house cleaning in general, then moves to a particular day of cleaning:

But on Saturdays all four of the girls worked hard all day doing the cleaning and the extra cooking. . . . Joan [the name given to the character who represents Mary Ben-nion] did most of the scrubbing and sweeping. She loved to make things clean and orderly. To her, order was like honesty and truth, and cleanliness like "virtue" which she had been taught was dearer than life. And if you worked hard it was more fun afterward when you read stories. (56)

She then describes the narratives she loves—Cinderella, tales of the chivalric knights and their ladies, and the love stories in the *Ladies Home Journal*. She has adopted these fictions as the ideal of romantic life:

How heavenly, she thought, it would be, to be loved by a strong, beautiful, pure young man, like the one whose picture she had cut out of the *Journal* and put in the tray of her new trunk. He was a prince, in a handsome uniform, and was standing on a platform, before all his people, renouncing his chance to become a king, because of his love for the beautiful girl he was holding in his

arms. The girl was looking adoringly up at him as he spoke to the crowd. Joan longed to be grown up so she could be loved like that. (56)

The narrative establishes the state of Joan's mind before the revelation of her father's unusual marriage. The narrator continues the description of spring cleaning, describing, as in the essay, her feeling that something is wrong in the family:

Joan was very tired as she got down from the small stepladder she had been standing on, and looked with satisfaction at the medicine cupboard. . . . Joan went into her room and lay down to rest a bit before supper. But as soon as she got comfortably relaxed on her bed she felt the old uneasiness come back. What could the argument have been about between her parents the night before, after they had gone to bed? She had never heard her father speak to her mother except tenderly till about a year before, now he did it often, at night, in their room. (57)

As she meditates on this problem, she explores the ways her father has been aggressive or angry: he has always shouted at the hired men and sometimes at the children. He is impatient when someone does something incorrectly. But she also remembers him reading stories at night in a loving manner. She then describes several anecdotes where she is relieved when truth destroys illusion: she is frightened by the shadowy figure of a man in the barn but her brother Harry (named for their father) reveals it to be a piece of wallpaper in the shape of a man; Harry laughs at her worry that their father would ever become poor; Harry explains that porcupines can't propel their quills; Harry tells her that bears are as afraid of people as people are frightened of bears. Each time he reveals the truth, Harry laughs at her simplicity. "But Joan didn't mind being laughed at. She was just relieved to find out the truth" (59). The author is preparing the reader for the destruction of an illusion which is anything but a relief—the traumatic revelation of her father's polygamy.

The next act in the narrative is the arrival of the carriage just in time for dinner. In the essay Mary writes:

I hurriedly got supper cooked—and just in time for the return of the family from a trip to Salt Lake where they went to meet my mother's eldest sister, Mrs. Delia

Booth, who often came from Provo to visit us, and whom we all loved very much. (6)

In the essay her mother has been weeping in her room, giving the children the excuse that she has a headache. However, in the novel she accompanied the others to Salt Lake. The narrator continues,

Joan jumped, and getting up off her mother's bed [she had been resting on her own bed—a glitch in the novel], hurried into the kitchen just in time to see the carriage drive past the kitchen window. Her father and mother and Harry had gone to the city and brought Aunt Amelia, who was visiting with Aunt Agatha, to stay with them for a few days before going back to Bountiful. (60)

The two descriptions of the next narrative movement, the finding of a note written by the polygamous wife, are identical, except for the narrative position. The narrator in the essay is more aware of the impending unhappiness:

I had the table set and the food all ready to serve when the family trooped through the kitchen and gathered around the supper table. Mother came out to help me carry the food into the dining room. I was taking a last satisfying look in the direction of the bathroom when my eye caught a white spot on the floor. It was a folded piece of paper, the kind my Aunt Augusta used when she wrote to us from Japan—we called it onion skin. I picked it up and unfolded it. Instead of being addressed to "Dear Susie" as I expected it to be, it was addressed instead to "Dear Heber" [Mary's father and brother were both named Heber], and it wasn't from Aunt Augusta; the writing was round like a child's. I turned the paper over and looked at the signature. It was simply "M." My puzzlement grew into a sickening premonition of some evil I couldn't even guess at. "Mama," I said, "Whose letter is this?" Mama was carrying the last dish into the dining room and didn't even send a glance in my direction as she said, very low, "I'll tell you after supper." (7)

The narrator in the novel is more childlike, less able to read the faces of the adults:

Harry was putting the team away, and the family was seated at the table, when Joan got to the dining room. Evelyn was lighting the hanging lamp over the table, and her mother, when she [Joan] got to the kitchen, was pouring the creamed vegetables into a bowl. Joan picked up another bowl and began dishing up the potatoes; her father didn't like to be kept waiting at meal times. Her

foot touched a crackly piece of paper. Setting the dish on the back of the stove, she picked it up. It was a letter. "Dear Harry," it said, "Little Sarah is sick; I wish you were here." Turning the page over she read the signature. It was just "M." Who, in such a round girlish handwriting, could be addressing her father by his first name? It must be some poor widowed cousin of her fathers, Joan thought, as she handed the piece of paper to her mother saying, "Who wrote this?" Her mother took the roast out of the oven and swiftly slid it onto a platter. She didn't answer till she was starting toward the dining room door, then, "I'll tell you after supper," she said very softly, without turning her head. (60-61)

The mood of the meal is strained, her father preoccupied as he reads the account of a polygamy trial. Again, the essay portrays the girl as already aware that something is not right:

I entered the dining room like a sleep-walker and sat down in my accustomed chair between Ethelyn and Lucile. . . . No one was talking. No one was eating. Papa had forgotten to "ask the blessing." Instead he was reading from the newspaper and his face was white. Mama and Aunt Delia were keeping their eyes steadily on his face. In a moment he began reading aloud: "The girl's mother, Mrs. Bringham [Mayme's mother], refused to testify at the trial today." No one asked, "What trial?" No one said a word. (7-8)

The novel uses an ironic disjunction between the character's naive perception and that of the reader. Once again the novel's character is less aware of the nature of the familial tension. Joan misreads her father's pale face:

Joan took her place at the table between Lucy and Evelyn. Why didn't her father ask the blessing? He was reading the newspaper. Funny! He had never read at mealtime before. Her mother and Aunt Amelia were staring at him. So was Evelyn. The little boys were giggling and making faces at each other. Ellen and Lucy were looking at some sparrow eggs Lucy was holding in her hand. Suddenly her father began reading aloud.

"Mrs. Bingham, the girl's mother, refused to testify at the trial today." Then he stopped as abruptly as he had begun. He looked pale. Poor father, Joan thought, with his sciatic rheumatism coming on him without warning, and nothing anyone could do about it. But she wished he would ask the blessing. She was starving. (61)

In both versions the four girls leave the table and proceed upstairs, where Mary learns the secret of her

father's polygamy. The journal says nothing about this event; the essay shows Mary's reaction, but never speaks the words of the unhappy revelation:

Suddenly my sister Ethelyn squeezed my hand under the table, got up, and, going behind my chair, whispered to Lucile. Little Helen pushed back her chair and followed the three of us wonderingly as we went into the hall and upstairs to the south bedroom where we girls slept. Ethelyn sat on the bed she and I shared. The rest of us gathered in a circle on the floor close to her. We waited for we knew not what revelation.

Though the lamps were lighted down stairs, it was still twilight outside and the windows framed a softly tinted sky fretted with budding tree branches. The air was mild and scented with blossoms. The world seemed to be holding its breath with pity for what was about to happen to the soul of a child. For I was as unprepared to meet the blow that then descended upon me as a newborn baby would be to defend itself from the attack of a man-eating tiger. As I write this I weep for the little girl that was I, but I pretended to be asleep as first Ethelyn, then Lucile, and finally Helen get up, dress, and go quietly downstairs. Knowing I couldn't lie there forever, (I found out I couldn't die), I got up, dressed woodenly, and then just sat on the edge of the bed unable to go downstairs and meet papa. I never wanted to see him again. I wished I could forget him as though he had never existed. (8)

Even here, in a memoiristic essay, she chooses not to name clearly her father's act. However, in the novel, the most distancing of the three forms, the actual words of the revelation are expressed, as well as her father's injunction to silence:

Her mother turned in her chair and looked hard at her, as though she could read her thoughts. She felt ashamed. But then her mother looked the same way at Evelyn. Evelyn touched Joan's hand and, pushing her chair back from the table, walked quickly toward the hall. Joan jerked Lucy's sleeve before following her. Lucy and Ellen looked at their sisters for a second and then scrambled after them. Evelyn had gone so fast up the straight steep stairway that she was seated on the edge of her and Joan's bed by the time Joan got to the big bedroom where the girls slept. Evelyn had some secret to tell them, that was sure, and it must be pretty important, thought Joan, to have the four of them leave the table before they had started to eat. (61-62)

Joan wonders about the secret and wishes Evelyn would tell them quickly so they could all go back to

dinner. Joan's ignorance seems designed to increase the irony in the scene; the reader suspects what the character doesn't know.

They were all looking up at Evelyn but her head was bent so low they could hardly see her face. There was something strange about this, and also about the way her hands lay so limply in her lap, and the way her shoulders sagged. . . . "Papa is married to Maida Bingham, and she has a baby."

Slowly Joan sank back on the floor, as the words clanked together like links of an iron chain dropped on the ground. But they didn't belong *together*. They didn't make the slightest kind of sense. She *couldn't* have heard them *rightly*. But Evelyn didn't move—or speak again. Just sat there, still, with her head sinking till not even any of her face showed.

A sheet of blackness appeared in front of Joan's eyes and she couldn't breathe. Then her breath came back and she could see but there was a suffocating pain in her chest. She couldn't move or make a sound.

"Girls!" The children's faces jerked as though attached to a wire, toward the door to the stairway where they could see a dark form, below a white blur, that was a face.

"Never breathe to a living soul what you have just heard." The words roared out of the darkness. It was their father who had spoken to them. . . . In the silence that followed, an owl called to its mate in the orchard. It sounded like a woman's moan, "Oh, oh." The smell of blossoms became heavy in the room but there was silence like that in a mortuary. (62-3)

Only in the novel are the words actually said, "Papa is married to Maida Bingham, and she has a baby." Only in the novel does the father charge his children with silence. The law of silence is so powerful that it operates invisibly in the other forms, masking even its own power.

One explanation of the code of silence that continued into the twentieth century is the fear of legal persecution. The Manifesto was pronounced before Mary was a year old, but prosecution and later persecution, from outside of and within the Church, continued long afterward. But I don't believe this explains the code of silence within the family. In "The Repressive Hypothesis," Michel Foucault suggests that silence concerning sexuality was a tool of control in Victorian times. Actually, interest in sexuality magnified as discourse concerning it was repressed. Through silence, Victorian

middle-class males protected their dominance and sexual freedom. All that Foucault says about Victorian sexuality seems true of Mormon polygamists. I've found no record that Mary as a child found any adult with whom she could talk directly about her anguish. Evidence in the essay and the novel suggests that she couldn't discuss her father's polygamy even with her mother. This silence may be similar to that imposed in our own time inside alcoholic or abusive families; these families guard a secret which no member can mention. While Mary Bennion's anguish concerning the discovery of her father's polygamy may seem excessive to the reader, it is obvious that she felt it as strongly as the trauma felt by an abused child or a child of an alcoholic. Only as an adult did she try to express her unhappiness.

As a child, according to both the essay and the novel, Mary withdrew after her discovery, shutting herself in her room for an introspective search and struggle. In "The End of Childhood" the child is angry with her father for marrying after the Manifesto, thus breaking both the law of the land and that of the Church. But his violation goes beyond formal law:

And, even if polygamy had no law of any kind forbidding it, papa should have known that if he practiced it, it would break mother's heart. Mama wasn't like other women. She was sensitive to the slightest hurt. And this was the greatest hurt in the world. It would kill her, and he would be her murderer. She would hide her agony till she died, just as she had been doing all this past year. (8-9)

Looking back, the girl remembers many clues of her father's polygamy: her father reading to her mother out of a book entitled "Celestial Marriage," which the essayist says was filled not with reasons but excuses; several curious visits by Mayme Bringhurst to her mother, one while her mother was sick. She remembers that Mayme wore a "fully gathered unbelted mother-hubbard dress—the kind worn in those days only by women who were pregnant" (9). She also remembers coming upon Mayme sleeping in a chair in the parlor:

I stood still for minutes looking at her—spell-bound by her beauty. Her skin was waxlike in its clear creamy color, her lashes were thick and long, and curled on the ends;

and her hair was a shining mound of heavy golden braids on the crown of her head. I don't know how long I should have remained in this trance of admiration if mother hadn't come indoors just then. She went past me into the parlor without speaking and shut the door. I went away puzzled. (10)

In both versions Mary/Joan searches her memory and stays in her room, refusing to come down until her mother comes up to get her. In the essay, her mother comes for her the same evening; in the novel, the next morning. As the girl hears her mother's steps on the stairway, she quickly spreads out some photographs as if she has been examining them. Neither mother nor child, despite the knowledge they share, can break the injunction to silence. In both versions her mother brings her out of her slough of despond with indirection, asking the child to write a letter to the polygamous wife. The essayist writes that the "riddle was dark—unfathomable, and my heart was slowly breaking" (10). She continues:

If it could only break, literally, and I could stop living. This pain was unendurable. I cried out to God for help. God had always answered my prayers before and, as I knew, He would, He answered this one. For I heard my mother's soft slow footsteps on the stairway. I suddenly came alive in every fibre of my being. (Mother mustn't guess how I felt.) I reached the floor by my trunk in one panther-like movement and carefully raising the lid took out a boxful of pictures and letters and strewed them around me, keeping one in my hand, and keeping my eyes on it as though with fascinated interest. Even when mother spoke my name, I couldn't and didn't look up. "I came to ask you to do something for me," said mama, and, as though sensing that I was unable to speak, she went on, "I want you to write a letter to Mayme telling her you—we all—love her and want her to come home soon." Mercifully she did not pause for my answer, but went on, her beautiful voice that had spoken comfort so often in the past was now meeting a supreme test, but it never faltered. "She is so young to be far away from all her family and friends, and gets so frightened when the baby is sick. Use your nicest stationery, the box you got for Christmas. I brought you pen and ink." She handed me the pen and set the bottle of ink in the tray of the trunk. When I looked up there was no one in the room but me. If I had been a mystic I would have said I had been visited by an angel. . . .

Slowly my taut muscles relaxed. I took a sheet of paper out of the Christmas box, opened the bottle of ink, dipped the pen, just doing something—anything—was a

relief. I started writing. With no feelings of any kind I wrote the words my mother had suggested, as though I had been hypnotized. I didn't know what address to put on the envelope, so I took it to mama—still effortlessly. My mother had made a way for me to get back into my life—however broken—and now I had hope that God and mama would always be able to make things come out right in the end, maybe it would be a long time—maybe not in this world—but sometime, somewhere things would come right. God and mama couldn't fail.

So that is why I didn't die, or kill my father, or go insane. I had a mother—the best mother that ever lived. (10-11)

That last line is the end of the essay. Her mother appears in the form of an angel, and the narrator is left hoping for a future in which wrongs are made right. The narrative is angled to show her mother's angelic but passive, victimized nature. While the sorrow at the time could only be indirectly voiced, later all emotion is expressed in excessive and sentimental language. Mary's attempts to reconcile or rationalize her father's behavior result in either silent avoidance or sentimentality, both of which finish the subject prematurely, either avoiding burying it or ignoring its complexity.

The novel is more open-ended if taken as a whole; however, the end of the passage which describes the day of revelation ends with a similar effusive epiphany:

And then she heard soft footsteps on the carpeted stairway. With one swift movement she reached her trunk and jerking the lid open, sat on the floor beside it and brushed a pile of snapshots into her lap, scattering a few on the floor beside her. As her mother came into the room, Joan saw only the hem of her skirt. She fastened her eyes on a picture of her classmates at school, pretending to be completely absorbed.

"Joan," said her mother, "I want you to do something for me. Write a letter to Maida. She is far away from her friends and family, and little Sarah is sick." She paused for an answer but Joan couldn't move or make a sound. "Just tell her we all love her and will be happy when she can come home." Her mother's slender white hand came into view, as a paper and pencil were placed in the till of the trunk. Then the swirl of her skirt disappeared and her soft footsteps were heard again on the stairs.

Picking up the paper Joan put a book under it and began to write. It was a relief to be able to move her muscles.

"Dear Maida: We all love you." The pencil went on

forming the words her mother had dictated but someone else seemed to be writing them.

When she came downstairs, no one was there but her mother, who smiled as she said, "I will address the envelope. We can't let anyone know where Maida is, or Papa might have to go to the penitentiary, like so many of the brethren had to do in the old days of polygamy." Joan handed her mother the sheet of paper and walked through the parlor. Then she ran through the dining room and the kitchen, closing the screen door noiselessly. She would go to the grove of trees by the road and hide there until she could control herself. She longed to scream, but there was no place to go where she wouldn't be heard. (63-64)

She walks outside toward the field where she is supposed to herd cattle. As she passes the barn, she sees two of her father's hired men. And the novelist writes a curious and vague passage:

Off toward the corral fence two pigs were making a horrid noise, and a strong familiar odor struck Joan's nostrils. She ran as fast as she could through the corral and down the road to where the cows were grazing. But she had seen the embarrassment of the men. She hated men—all men!

Sobbing, she threw herself down in a mass of sweet clover that edged the irrigation ditch. Her tears seeped into the root-filled ground. God had made him do it, she thought, just as he had Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and all the others. "I hate you, God, I hate you," she shrieked. "Kill me. Go ahead, kill me. I'd be glad." She beat the ground with her clenched fists, then buried her face in the clover stalks, her body twisting and writhing with agony. After awhile she lay still. She could hear the crickets singing. They seemed to be trying to tell her something. She rolled over on her back. The tall clover shaded her face as its tops drooped over her. The sky was a deep clear blue, and a few white clouds were piled high like bunches of cotton. When Joan was younger she had imagined they were angels looking down at her. (65)

This passage, which moves from pigs to men, is curious. What were the pigs doing? What is the strong familiar odor? What is the connection between pigs and men? I assume that the pigs may have been breeding, but I doubt that this activity is marked by any odor beyond the normal stench of the pigs. Whatever the exact reference, this juxtaposition of animals and men marks her disillusionment. Later she is soothed by her surroundings, just as she had been soothed by her mother. Once again the

emotion is encapsulated.

However, the novel doesn't stop at this reference to wholeness, the wholeness that seals off the essay. The novel instead emphasizes the depraved nature of her father and of all men. Occasionally it moves beyond that labeling—men are devils, women angels—to a more complex questioning:

Her mother had said that the angels brought babies to the earth. For a while it had hurt her—the lie. But she knew her mother wouldn't have said it if she hadn't thought that sometimes it was right to lie. Maybe that's the way it was with her father. Maybe he *thought* what he did was right. And maybe it *was*. It might seem wrong—terribly wrong. But God could see ahead, and he knew what people must do. Sometimes they had to kill in wars. It was wicked to kill, and yet *sometimes it was right*. (65-66)

This meditation is broken off as Joan's sister calls that the cattle are crossing into the alfalfa, where they might bloat.

My purpose here is not to analyze what happens in the rest of the novel, but I will say that it continues to focus on her father's cruelty to her mother, who is ill much of the time. The author describes the difficult dance of a marriage that involves one man and three women. Her general emotion is anger at her father and Maida. Watching her father sitting between her mother and Maida, she writes, "They were torturers that surpassed, in cruelty, the masters of the Inquisition, or the witch burners of Salem" (74). She describes a long argument with a Sunday School teacher about polygamy, and the same argument with her brother, who tells her to avoid the mysteries. This intelligent, skeptical, willful woman found that neither her religious teachers nor her family members would engage the issues with her as she struggled to confront her father's act. They wanted her to leave the matter in silence. The novel is unfinished, leaving off at page 121—the arguments still unresolved.

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tion for Mormon Letters, 13 January 1996, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

NOTE

1. Mary consciously imitated Eliza R. Snow's style. She may mean, ironically, that like Snow and her own ancestors, she dutifully records righteous acts, avoiding any doubt or controversy.

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Toward an LDS Aesthetic of the Novel: A Report from the Front Lines

Benson Y. Parkinson

In his 1995 AML address, Wayne Booth spoke of the need for a critical literary culture among the Mormons. This implies, among other things, LDS writers who devote a sufficient portion of their lives to master their crafts. It implies readers who read LDS books regularly and discerningly and talk about them with friends and family. The best, most successful and challenging writers know their audience, understand their minds and hearts, and seek to lift them. The most discerning readers select the best writers and the best books, so hopefully, with upward pressure from both ends, the whole culture rises.

This has been an ideal of mine since I was a teenager in the 1970s. My excitement was sparked by events at BYU and by story collections by Douglas Thayer and Donald Marshall. As a reader, I wanted books that addressed me, that took my beliefs seriously, that spoke to the highest in me, and that stretched me. I conceived it as a mission to write books like that, if no one else would, and while I took up and abandoned the plan any number of times during the next ten years, I never stopped wanting it. When it came time to graduate from BYU and actually make the decision, my wife and I said, let's try it a few years rather than spend our lives wishing we had.

I think I can sum up my aesthetic ideals like this:

1. I wanted to make a book that played itself out in the same universe I and my family live in. We exist before we're born, we grow up and are baptized and seek testimonies and go on missions and marry in the temple and have families and partake of the whole fullness of life.

2. I wanted a book that was stylistically rich. I wanted to bring all the tools I knew to the work, to

use symbolism and allusion, particularly to the scriptures, to give my fictions layers of meaning.

3. I wanted to give my stories dramatic depth and breadth. I remember being thunderstruck at Shakespeare, in whom tears are always heightened by laughter and laughter by tears, and by Balzac, who through the piling on of details and characters and subplots and motives brings to a novel the whole sweep of life.

4. I sought a realistic treatment of my characters' psychology, but with a difference, and this is key: I took it as my task to foreground and attempt to do justice to their spiritual breakthroughs.

I decided to write a missionary novel. This seemed to me the formative experience for my generation of Latter-day Saints, and one that deserves epic treatment. I wrote the first chapter my last semester at BYU in 1985, for a contemporary writers' seminar taught by Bruce Jorgensen. I suppose Brother Jorgensen thought he'd rather read short stories than term papers; and though I hadn't taken creative writing, I was one who would rather write them. I wrote other chapters for Levi Peterson and Gordon Allred at Weber State after graduation, when they were kind enough to let me sit in on their creative writing sections. I worked odd jobs and wrote and rewrote, figuring out my technique as I went. Before long I saw that I had bitten off more than I could chew, so I cut my novel in three. The first half of book one dealt with the varied backgrounds of four elders, what went into their makeups, and why they came on missions. The second half followed them through the pressure-cooker of the MTC. Book two would treat their first year as junior companions in the field, and the third book would bring them to a climax and home. Even with that, it took me until

1990 before I had the first book in a shape I could show anyone.

I thought I had a good sense of my chosen audience, which I described as "educated-faithful." I knew plenty of Mormons like that, who read novels, but not Mormon ones, because they weren't addressed to them. Mormon fiction appealed to one side or the other, to those who had been to college and had their tastes refined, or to those who believed and embraced the gospel simply and fully, but rarely both. Either they bored my friends with artless didacticism and flaccid recastings in Mormon garb of stories that weren't compelling in the first place, or they exasperated them with gripes that seemed misplaced, doubts about issues that seemed simple and settled, and a burden of guilt they didn't share. I stood at once with Bruce Jorgensen and Richard Cracroft. I wanted to be open to all the world's stories and techniques, to learn from each. But I was sure that contemporary Mormon literature was failing to speak in an authentic voice. I trusted my instincts in the matter. I didn't know whom else to trust. The advice of my professors was good; but in spite of their literary successes, they hadn't exactly been there, in the sense of capturing the imagination of that educated, faithful audience I sought. No one had. Nor was I able to get much out of friends and family who read the manuscript. They would underline misspellings for me, but they didn't want to hurt my feelings. Or they didn't trust their judgment—I was the expert in their minds, not them. Maybe that's a drawback of this particular audience, which has been to college but generally not to study criticism.

I first sent my manuscript to a publisher in March of 1990. I chose Deseret Book, because it had the best distribution of any LDS publisher and because some of its nonfiction did well with an audience similar to the one I was after. My one-page cover letter described the book in a few brief sentences, then spent a few more on the audience, and that was all. I figured that when all was said and done, the book stood on its own. I got it back in about eight weeks with a standard rejection letter and sent it out again, to Gibbs Smith, which returned it the same day, with an even briefer rejection. I sent it out six more times over the next months. My cover letter tended to get briefer as I went along. Some publish-

ers kept the manuscript the standard six to eight weeks; some returned it immediately. Some of the rejections were longer and seemed more personalized, though identical letters I've received on other projects since show that they were merely more tactful. Signature, the last of this group to see it, kept it eight full months. I happened to run into one of the readers, who told me she thought the writing was strong, but that the characters failed to break out of their roles. I disagreed, unless by that she meant that none apostatized.

Here was the old conundrum. You can't get published unless you have a name. You can't get a name until you've published. My old tack wasn't working, so I began sending out sample chapters with plot summaries and a discussion of the intended audience. I tried a firm called Randall, thinking it the same as one by that name that published fiction in the '80s, including Herbert Harker and Marilyn Brown. I'm not entirely sure it wasn't, but they weren't doing fiction now. To my surprise, though, I got a personalized letter back, complimenting my diligence and talent and offering some brotherly criticism: "What 'pre-mission age' youth do you know that is going to read a 546 page novel?" Though the writer put "pre-mission age" in quotes, I had never suggested a youthful target audience. This was a book for adults, and I'd said so in my cover. I had sent a passage that I thought a little lighter and funnier than the others, but that demonstrated my technique. The missionaries, toward the end of their stay in the MTC, get talking about the Second Coming, and grow so excited they can't work. One of the missionaries repeats a rumor that his aunt's best friend's cousin's neighbor heard on the Church Office Building elevator. Anyone who has lived in Utah for more than ten years is aware of the phenomenon. The prophet is supposed to have said something somewhere and the next day there's a run on grocery stores. So I had my character tell the story. The reader circled the word "prophet" and wrote in the margin, "This is the Lord's Anointed here, that you're putting words into."

This reader misread my intentions from start to finish, but it was feedback, anyway, the most I'd gotten in a year and a half of trying. I sent a sample chapter with supporting materials to another publisher, then another, and in each case got personalized

responses. One, whose fiction has done well among teenage males, said my characters lived and breathed, but that all that detail got in the way. "If you could cut 300 pages of detail and add 100 pages of story I would be very interested in seeing the manuscript again." Once more, I suspected, this was someone trying to see the book in terms of an audience I never intended. I was at the bottom of my list of publishers and had no idea where to go from there. Levi Peterson suggested in May of 1992 that I try some of the old ones again. It seemed pointless at first, and yet in August it suddenly struck me as perfectly good advice.

That brought me back to Deseret Book. I sent my longer proposal, with a different sample chapter than I had before. I had noticed a number of times how emotionally flat the fiction coming out of Deseret Book seemed. The same phenomenon was visible in the *Ensign*, in my opinion. I doubt that the Church is opposed to emotions beyond that narrow range, but people give such sanction to Church-sponsored media and take offense so easily that the Church has just decided to leave more broad-ranging emotional expression to other publishers and other magazines. My novel is an ensemble piece, with four central characters that I examine by turns. Malan Rignell is a rancher's son who serves as a calming center for the others. That's why I put Malan's chapter in the book's center with all the turmoil of the others before and after. That was the chapter I sent to Deseret Book, and it worked.

They kept it their standard eight weeks and longer. When I called, I was told by the secretary it had gone to a fourth reader. Is that good? I asked, and she informed me it was good indeed. Another six weeks passed before Deseret Book expressed preliminary interest. Richard Peterson, the editor I worked with, was very encouraging and shared notes from one of the readers that called it "incredibly good writing--perhaps the best fiction I've seen since I started working at Deseret Book." For all that, Deseret Book would not commit, nor could I get Richard to tell me in any detail what changes would be required. Such a thing costs a publisher money, and he informed me he was not authorized to spend any more money on this project. When I begged him, he finally consented to mark up a chapter for me on his own time. Based on that, I was able to do

the rewrite.

Changes made to the manuscript at this point were mostly to make it briefer. Richard, like the other editor, saw too much detail. He compared it to trying to drink from a fire hose. For all that, he didn't make me trim too awfully much. I thought Deseret Book would be concerned with the sexual content. Cordell Anthon, another of the characters, leaves the MTC briefly and nearly commits fornication. Richard assured me it was all right, and yet reading notes would come back that expressed discomfort. Deseret Book kept the novel until August, a total of twelve months, before rejecting it. Richard and Sheri Dew both told me they were sure the book would see print and that the editorial staff had been solidly behind it. But at Deseret Book, all publications have to be approved by the board, which includes a General Authority and, I believe, some business people, and they had finally turned it down. I pressed Richard for their reasons. Was it the sexual content? He said no, he had never heard anything along those lines, only that they were concerned the book might not be marketable. He told me Deseret Book cannot lose money, that the Church is unwilling to subsidize it with tithing funds, and that because of this it can't take the risks a private publisher might.

Covenant meanwhile had accepted a children's book I wrote with my wife. I called the office soon after to check on how that was progressing, only to learn its new managing editor was Giles Florence, who had left a job as managing editor of the *Ensign* to go there. I mentioned the novel and a second children's book, and he said yes, send them down. He said Covenant wanted to form long-term relationships with writers, with the writers agreeing to bring all their works to them first. I said that's fine as long as the writers get something in return. I sent him the novel, also I believe the several-page proposal I had developed, also a page of all the most complimentary things the Deseret Book readers had written, together with a couple of nice things Richard Cracroft and Thomas Rogers had told me. Letting my manuscript speak for itself hadn't gotten me anywhere. Giles told me later that that page of quotes had indeed caught his eye. He liked the novel and began pushing it with his own board, which included editorial people from the different divisions,

marketing people, and, I believe, the owners. He sent me a contract, offering no advance, and with so much wiggle room on their side I realized it represented little more than an expression of good faith. I signed on October 18, 1993. There certainly weren't any other offers on the table. And it seemed better than what Deseret Book had offered.

Covenant planned to release the book around the LDS Booksellers Convention in August. Giles waited until June before he had me do much, and then it was on the order of what Deseret Book had had me do, though here the emphasis was on smoothing up rather than cutting. A couple of items I changed had to do with Cordell Anthon. This character's name was intended as a pun on Corianton in the Book of Mormon. Randall L. Hall had the idea before me, but I had it independently of him and several months before he published *Cory Davidson*. I must have changed things a dozen times. No matter how many clues I gave, nobody caught the allusion. Finally I named the chapter "Corianton." Now people said I was being too obvious, but I'm afraid I wasn't. I also made changes to the scene where Corry nearly commits fornication. One reader at Covenant was amazed at the passage's power but came away unsure as to whether Corry had gone through with the act or not. I cleared that up. I also changed the order in which the characters are presented. Corry's character readers uniformly found grating, but they responded more warmly than I had anticipated to Phil Jeppsen, an Australian convert and an intellectual. I took Corry out of first place and put Phil there instead. There was also the matter of the title. I had called the book *The Little Mission*, after the missionary dictum that the MTC is like your whole mission in miniature, or *A Place Without Weather*, referring to the intensity of the classroom experience, and ironically to the elders' internal storms. Giles informed me, and the contract specified, that the title and cover were the publisher's purview. He asked me what I thought of *Set Apart*. I said it was nice, that I liked it better than a lot of things they might have come up with, and that it was, after all, what the book was about.

The editor in charge of Covenant's books on tape sent me a letter now, telling me to hurry and get them the condensed version of the book for recording per our contract. We had no contract for a book

on tape, but their contracts were so weak anyway I decided, rather than stir the waters, I'd go along. Going from 155,000 words to 30,000 words is beyond what a reasonable person would describe as "condensing," but after six weeks or so I came up with a document I could live with and sent it in. Then in July Giles called and said there were problems. Once again the board was having trouble seeing this book as marketable. From different things people had said, I suspected that Covenant too was trying to envision this for adolescent readers. A salesman later told me he had been pushing the book to booksellers as a good book to give to a young man considering going on a mission. I have to ask, are works of fiction for adolescents only in our culture? something we outgrow? Giles admitted there were problems that way, but it wasn't from his not having explained to them again and again. Still, the book had to be cut in order to reach more readers. He went through with hedge trimmers, not scissors; and before he finished, nearly a fourth of the book was gone. I was particularly sorry to see a couple of colorful minor characters go, as well as a good part of Phil's existential struggle prior to his conversion, which meant a great deal to me personally. I suppose such cuts were necessary. My stamina as a reader is probably greater than most. I am a novelist, after all. Books for me last, not days and weeks, but months and years. I introduced chapter headings now to make the book even more accessible. I used them to prepare readers for shocks, to underline the passage of time, to make symbolism explicit, and to introduce allusions to settings apart, as the title wanted. The book previously had few or none.

Naturally I found this process stressful in the extreme. I had begged Giles to plan the rewrite during the winter. Now I had spent the entire summer on it, which left me and my family in difficult financial circumstances. Covenant did a cover, put it on the first page of its summer catalog, and had me give a speech with six or seven other featured writers before a crowd I'd guess of eight hundred at the LDS Booksellers Convention. Then suddenly Giles had left Covenant. I was informed that I had no contract for the book on tape and so they wouldn't be doing it. Not only that, but the novel itself was in question, though there had been around 2,300 pre-orders. It had gone to press, but

there had been delays. It hadn't been printed, and now they were reevaluating. If I was nervous before, you can imagine how I felt now. I broke out in shingles, and that fall, one by one, my children got chicken pox. Over the next six weeks Covenant did some market research and, based on the results and with no one in the office to defend the book, decided it would not publish my novel in anything like its present form. It's obviously a buyers' market in the publishing industry. There are enough people desperate enough to publish that a company can ask them to work for them for a year with no promise of remuneration and then send them packing. It had happened to me twice now.

Covenant did send the results of the market survey. These mostly confirmed my suspicions that Covenant had the wrong audience in mind. Yet I had no idea that those unintended readers would take such offense from my writing. Such was never my intention. To choose two examples among many, I wanted to depict the intellectual Phil's intentness even as an infant. So I had his mother determined to breast-feed him, until he sucked so hard she developed mastitis and had to give it up. A reader called this "unnecessary," "offensive and not for myself or youth." Another passage, in which Corry has a mildly impure thought, elicited this comment: "[This] is so crude. . . . Makes me wonder if the author wants to write dirty but can only do so much with LDS readers." I think more than anything that the readers were offended by my missionaries' lack of decorum. Several refused to believe missionaries were capable of using slang among themselves or while kidding around. Only a couple of readers liked the book at all. One said, "I am impressed with the way the characters allowed me to talk with my 15-year-old son about matters he would never discuss before. . . . We need troubled characters so our troubled youth know they're not weird and hopeless." I appreciate this, but I must stress that I do not consider my characters troubled. I recognize that they have weaknesses, just as we did on our missions, but I'm willing to bear with them until their strengths show through, and they do. Each gets a testimony, which I explore in detail. Each breaks through his barriers; and in small ways, each works miracles.

I had sent the manuscript out thirteen separate

times now. Each round I came away understanding more about the publishing world and better prepared. Giles Florence had been hired as managing editor of Gold Leaf, the subsidiary of Aspen that published Betty Eadie and Curtis Taylor's national best-seller *Embraced by the Light*. I knew Giles would be my advocate there. For this, the fourteenth time, rather than a manuscript or my proposal, I hand-delivered a copy of the galleys, complete with my editing marks, and a color copy of the cover Covenant had done. It took until January of 1995 before Giles was in a position to offer me a contract. He signed it on behalf of Aspen. It included an advance, based largely I think on the pre-orders at Covenant. It strikes me that Covenant in all fairness should have done the same. If they were going to send me away after all they put me through, at least it wouldn't be with nothing.

Paul Rawlins has been my editor at Aspen. He and two others there each had the same experience with the book. The first read-through is quick, largely to determine whether a publisher wants to take on a project. Each of the three was sure after this reading that the book still needed major cuts. It was too long, or too dark, or it bogged down. The second, more careful read-through aims at finding specific problems. This time each of the three saw characterization and details they had missed the first time through. Darla Isackson, Aspen's managing editor, told me that with most books, if a passage is slow or doesn't quite work, they figure they're better off cutting than trying to repair. Mine was a different sort. Here she said it was a matter of choosing between equally good passages, which made the process all the more painful (for them for once, and not just me). We did make cuts on a small scale. Paul Rawlins is a short story writer, this year's winner of the Flannery O'Connor Book Award, and he brought an author's perspective to the process. Time and again he's responded to subtleties of tone and allusion that no one else has seen. When you go through a rewrite with an editor, you want the book to be stronger when you're done than when you started. When a person like Paul says, "I can see what you're doing in this passage, but this bit here bogs it down," it's almost a pleasure cutting.

Aspen required two structural changes. I began the book by panning over my four central characters

sitting in an orientation seminar in the MTC, doodling, fidgeting, trying their best to listen. It seems to me that one of the essential things in depicting a male missionary, newly a man, is showing how much boy there is left in him. This short chapter was followed by four long ones consisting mostly of flashback as I explored what brought the four missionaries there. One editor had a very negative reaction to those four elders in the orientation room acting so irreverently. She said she didn't like pausing over characters she didn't know and thought I ought to get to the action sooner. We talked about different approaches, but I finally decided to cut the scene entirely. The other change was in the order of the characters. Rather than Corry, the cocksure athlete, or Phil, the unintentionally aloof intellectual, they wanted the bumbling, comical, child-like Harvey Wilberg in first place. On the one hand, they explained, those readers who wanted to identify with the first character they met would be more receptive to Harvey. On the other, those for whom the term "character study" meant something weren't going to stop reading on his account.

I made another major change based in part on Covenant's market survey. The readers who liked the book best still wanted more of the loose ends wrapped up, and a stronger climax. Though I intended a strong climax in the third novel of the cycle, I hadn't seen it as important here. Life after all rarely plays itself out so neatly. I simply showed each of my four elders wrestling with his own demons and coming to some sort of internal resolution. But I couldn't ignore the market surveys. This was as close as I had come to connecting with that educated, faithful audience I was after. So I wrote a new ending. I had Elder Ferguson, a minor character, good-hearted but doubting and homesick, decide to go home. My four elders are so determined to keep him there that they wrestle with him, physically at first, then mentally, late into the night. Each must come up with his best answer for staying on a mission, and his most honest answer for why he himself came. These expository passages are my greatest departure from the received aesthetic, but I could tell people weren't going to be happy without them. The art is in having it come out naturally, and in the elders' true voices, and in building and peak-

ing properly. Aspen was happy with what I came up with, and I think I am too.

Just prior to the book's being typeset, Aspen informed me they didn't like the title. During a long meeting, their editorial, production, and marketing representatives each came with twenty or thirty titles, which they thrashed about and eliminated one by one. The only thing they would be happy with was *The MTC*. Paul Rawlins teased me that this would be spelled, *The Empty Sea*. It didn't matter. I could not live with it. There was no art in it, no play. At best you could take it as a Micheneresque title, like *Texas* or *Hawaii*. But that was misleading. The book was not about the MTC as an organic entity. Half the book takes place before the elders ever arrive. The marketing people said, "This is how you're going to reach your audience. This is how we can sell it." I said, "All right, I agree, it should have 'MTC' in the title--*MTC Summer*, *MTC Dreams*, *MTC Anything*, but not the MTC alone." The book was typeset with the title *MTC: First Convert*, which played on each elder's conversion, and their collective "conversion" of Ferguson. But even this wouldn't satisfy the marketing people, who insisted it be simply *The MTC*. In going over the galleys, I saw all the allusions to being set apart and realized that this phrase had to be in the title, or else they would leave the reader hanging. I knew holding out was dangerous, but I judged Aspen was committed to the book. I told them, "Making me change it this late in the game is beyond an imposition--it's unreasonable. I rewrote the book around the other one." I said, "Does my contract give you the right to choose the title? Because the only way I'm going to accept this is if it's forced on me." I told them I considered *The MTC: Set Apart* a good compromise. They were reluctant but accepted the title finally, Paul indicated, because it was something they could live with and because they were loath to "force the other one down [my] throat." The book came off the presses and was released 26 October 1995.

My conclusions? First of all, I must be nuts to have spent five years teaching myself how to write a novel, then five more slugging it out with publishers. You have to be in it for something besides money (I don't imagine if you split up my advance that I'd have made a nickel an hour) or even respectability (I have five children and no steady job). Second, I

conceive of that educated, faithful audience differently now. I knew it included readers who were sensitive to symbols and allusions and subtleties of style, but now I see it also includes recreational readers, who are educated, don't want their intelligence insulted, but mainly just want a good story.

I started this process with four "wants." I wanted a book with a Mormon worldview, with stylistic depth, with emotional range, and with psychological and spiritual verisimilitude. Ten years later I find myself obliged to add four "musts":

1. Protagonists must be accessible, and it must be clear who is the protagonist. Many readers, including intelligent ones, identify with the first major character they come across. They want to get on board and be taken for a ride.

2. Symbolic material must be explicit—or at least enough of it must be that readers know to look for more. A writer might take as his project to educate this people in typology, but he's got to dish it out in small doses in the beginning.

3. Connective and background passages must be relatively brief. For literary-minded readers these give a text richness, but for recreational ones they merely get in the way.

4. Plots and story lines must reach a clean climax and resolution.

Are these compromises? Perhaps, yet I don't think Dickens, Balzac, and the other old masters of the novel would have apologized for using such devices to bring a broad audience along. The key is in what you do with tools like these. If you use them to grab your readers and stretch them wider than they've ever been stretched before, then they're not compromises at all.

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The Ineffable Made Effable: Rendering Joseph Smith's First Vision as Literature

Richard H. Cracroft

I

... just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!* (JS-H 1:16-17)¹

This attempt by Joseph Smith, Jr., to render the ineffable as effable, to recreate in words the appearance of God the Father and God the Son to him in the spring of 1820, has become, over time, not only the foundational document and "fountainhead" of the Restoration (Backman, "First Vision," 515; Backman, *Joseph Smith*; Bushman 49ff), but a touchstone of faith and orthodoxy for the Latter-day Saints, whose "importance," writes James B. Allen, "is second only to belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth" (Allen, 29; see also Lambert and Cracroft; Allen, "Emergence"; Hill).

The First Vision, as Joseph dictated it in 1838 for *The History of the Church* and as canonized in 1880 as part of the Pearl of Great Price, is the mucilage of Mormonism, the unifying dynamic common to every Latter-day Saint. Paraphrasing Ernest Hemingway on *Huckleberry Finn*, we might assert that all of Mormonism comes from one event experienced by Joseph Smith called the First Vision. Indeed, all of Joseph Smith's subsequent revelations—and those of his successors in the First Presidency of the Church—reverberate with that First Vision and its complex of significances for every Latter-day Saint.

Joseph Smith's account, evolving as it did over time and through numerous tellings, is a powerful literary *tour de force* that not only centers Smith's

"charismatic authority" (Bloom 7) and authenticates and presents compelling evidence for Joseph's divine call to prophethood, but also reifies what Harold Bloom has called Smith's "authentic religious genius" and his "uncanny" religion-making knowledge as "the most gifted . . . of all American prophets" (82, 110, 127).

As the Saints would gradually come to understand, the vision also reestablishes the doctrine of an anthropomorphic God and theomorphic humankind, clarifies the being and relationship among the personages of the godhead, and elucidates the pattern of the relationship between the godhead and human beings through continuing revelation, not only from God to his prophets, but also from God to individual men and women—thereby promoting the faith-vitalizing, "thou art chosen" expectation in every believer of the possibility and imminence of his or her own Sacred Grove experience.

For all of these reasons, the First Vision is vital to the Saints' becoming a "people." Repeated and heartfelt recitations of, and testimonies sought and gained and uttered, have transformed the vision into that kind of "profound" story that, posits cultural pundit Neil Postman, provides an "organizing framework" that gives a people direction and enables them to "make sense out of the world" by providing a "theory about how the world works" (122-23). The First Vision is integral to the Mormon story and the Mormon people.

In the more than 150 years since Joseph Smith's death, twenty-four years following that First Vision, several generations of poets, dramatists, and writers of fiction have attempted, with varying success, to come to grips with the importance of the event, reifying the vision for their generations' consisto-

ries—reentering the Sacred Grove again and again through recounting, redacting, re-viewing, and re-rendering Joseph's experience in ways appropriate to their literary and didactic purposes. The results are interesting, instructive, indicative, and even, if sometimes disappointing, hopeful and thus promising.

Even a cursory survey of some of the poetry, drama and fiction generated by the First Vision demonstrates not only the firm and intimidating grip that Joseph Smith's revered recounting of the event has fastened upon Restoration poets and authors, but also discloses how imaginative contemporary Latter-day Saint writers are in finding innovative ways of examining, expanding, and universalizing Joseph's experience in the Sacred Grove to meet the spiritual needs of generations of Mormons "who knew not Joseph," but whose lives continue to be affected by his remarkable encounters with Deity.

II

Harold Bloom, in his refreshing and invigorating study of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, prophesies (secularly) that "a major American poet . . . some time in the future will write [the Mormon story] as the epic it was." Indeed, "Nothing else in all of American history strikes me," he continues, "as *materia poetica* equal to the early history of Joseph Smith" and his followers (79), and he calls for "strong poets, major novelists, [and] accomplished dramatists [probably Gentiles] . . . to tell [Joseph's] history" (127).

William Mulder, however, long ago anticipated and muted Bloom's clarion call for a Mormon epic with some hard-headed realities about the challenge of rendering the ineffable effable, about the difficulty of transforming the stuff of Mormonism and the matter of the First Vision into literature: "God, the best storyteller," he paraphrases Bernard DeVoto as stating, "made a better story out of Joseph and the Mormon wandering than fiction will ever equal" (210).

So strong was the personality of Joseph Smith, Jr., however, and so powerfully clear, honest, authoritative, and definitive is his rendering of the experience, that subsequent attempts at retelling the First Vision pale and shrink in comparison to the original and bring one to ask *why* anyone would desire to retell, refurbish, or re-render the event.

The challenge is formidable: To render in the right words and tone, without diminishing or sentimentalizing, trivializing or hyperbolizing, that awe and grandeur that approximate the experience itself—to render effable the vertical, the mantic, the transcendent, the spiritual, the ineffable; to transform a timeless event that has become sacralized and mythologized and thus heroic into a credible and accessible horizontal literature. It is a "consummation devoutly to be wished," a challenge not unlike calling for fiction that renders effable and credible but still sacred and transcendent the resurrection of Jesus Christ (notwithstanding attempts by Nicholas Kazantzakis, Jim Bishop, and Lloyd Douglas).

Though Joseph Smith, having refined his rendering of the First Vision through his 1832, 1835, 1838, and 1842 recountings of the event, never attempted to render his experience in any other literary form, he is credited for writing a poem entitled "The Vision," in that W. W. Phelps, the likely poet, renders in ballad stanzas Joseph's 16 February 1832, vision, at Hiram, Ohio, better known as Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

I, Joseph, the prophet, in spirit beheld,
And the eyes of the inner man truly did see
Eternity sketch'd in a vision from God,
Of what was, and now is, and yet is to be.

And the glory of God shone around where I was,
And there was the Son at the Father's right hand,
In a fulness of glory and holy applause.²

It not only becomes painfully evident that Phelps's verse (probably approved by Joseph) does not rise to the level of its subject, but also that the poet, with future generations of Latter-day Saint writers, is subject to the realities of historical tyranny—he cannot free himself, even for imaginative artistic purposes, from the assertive facts of "how it really was." Joseph's and Phelps's probable intent in recasting the vision of the three degrees of glory was the same as most future writers' intentions in recasting and retelling the First Vision—to teach it to the uninformed, to remind the believer, to inspire all who read the recounting, and to testify of the event and of Joseph's prophethood—and to achieve all of that without irreverencing the original, sacralized

account, without sounding a dissonant note in the minds of faithful Latter-day Saints who resist attempts to vary "the truth," as Joseph experienced, taught, and recorded it.

III

For many years, since its first publication in 1878, George Manwaring's hymn, "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," endured—and endures presently—as the authorized standard poetic alternative to Joseph's own account of the First Vision. In fact, the hymn, inspired in part by C. C. A. Christensen's painting *The First Vision*, has become for many the initial and enduring entry into the vision. Manwaring not only superimposes on the Sacred Grove two initial lines borrowed (from American composer Sylvanus Billings Pond) to create a poetic associationism harmonizing nature with God's purposes, but he also sets for all time, in beloved narrative verse, the received standard tone in dealing with the event, a tone imparting "Praise to [that] Man who communed with Jehovah!"—whom kings "shall extol . . . and nations revere" (*Hymns*, 27). "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," apparently heavily revised by the editors of the *Juvenile Instructor*, in which it first appeared (Davidson, 54-55), continues to illuminate the Sacred Grove:

Oh! how lovely was the morning!
Radiant beamed the sun above.
Bees were humming, sweet birds singing,
Music ringing through the grove.
When within the shady woodland
Joseph sought the God of love.

Humbly kneeling, sweet appealing—
'Twas the boy's first uttered prayer—
When the powers of sin assailing,
Filled his soul with deep despair;
But undaunted, still he trusted
In his Heavenly Father's care.

Suddenly a light descended,
Brighter far than noon-day sun,
And a shining glorious pillar
O'er him fell, around him shone.
While appeared two heav'nly beings,
God the Father and the Son.

"Joseph, this is my Beloved.
Hear him!"
Oh, how sweet the word!
Joseph's humble prayer was answered,
And he listened to the Lord.
Oh, what rapture filled his bosom,
For he saw the living God. (*Hymns*, 26)

Bowing to the primacy of Joseph's own account and Manwaring's hymnal rendering, "The First Vision," reprinted by the Church Missionary Committee from the Pearl of Great Price as the long-standing missionary tract "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story," remained undisturbed by Mormon or Gentile authors until well into the twentieth century. Joseph Smith himself, of course, was often *matæria poetica* during the last half of the nineteenth century, figuring in such various poems as Hannah Tapfield King's "An Epic Poem," Louisa L. Greene Richards's "The Three Josephs," and Orson F. Whitney's ambitious but turgid *Elias: An Epic of the Ages* (100-101, 103). Not until Alfred Osmond's epic-length poem *The Exiles* (1926), couched in the jogging cadences of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Hiawatha," do we discover another poetic, often skillful, and decidedly orthodox, rendering of the First Vision:

Kneeling down to ask the Father
For the wisdom that he needed,
He was forced into a conflict,
With an agency of evil
That was seeking to destroy him.

. . . .
Just how long the struggle lasted
He perhaps could never answer;
But when on the verge of falling
In the hands of his opponent,
He beheld a light descending
Brighter than the sun at noonday.
When it circled round about him,
He beheld two persons standing
In the brilliant light above him.
God the Father, introducing
His Beloved, the Redeemer,
Told the boy that he should listen
To the teachings of the Savior.
Simple, frank, yet firm and fearless
Is the strange, supernal story
Of the boy who sought for wisdom
In the grove where he encountered
All the potency of evil;

And when he was weak and helpless,
Saw the brilliant light descending,
Saw the glorified Redeemer,
Saw the presence of the Godhead,
And was told he had a mission
To perform among the people. (20-21)

A half-century later, in 1979, R. Paul Cracroft, in his Miltonic blank-verse, book-length epic *A Certain Testimony*, advances the Book of Mormon story by telling of Joseph's entry into the book's history through the First Vision and the subsequent appearances of Moroni. Cracroft stresses in his rendering Joseph's coming role as founder of the Church and varies from Joseph's telling by having Joseph recount the First Vision to his parents, who Richard Bushman claims were apparently left in the dark regarding any details of the vision.³

But at my terror's height
I saw a shaft of light above my head.
. . . Inside that light I saw
Two men I can't describe except to say
They looked like angels ought to look. One
spoke—
He even knew my name!—and said of Him
Who stood beside Him in the pillared light,
"Beloved is my first begotten Son
Who rules the Heavens with me. Hear ye Him!"
. . . .
The vision broke as fast as it had come.
I found myself supine, the leaves a-dance
Where stood the shaft of light, the grove at
peace—
As I had found it when I came. I tell
You this in testimony of the truth
I've learned: that if God's Church can yet
be found
On earth, *my* hand will help to raise it up.
(Bk. XII, 411-12)

The short, simple, moving treatment of the First Vision by Elder S. Dilworth Young, in his *The Long Road from Vermont to Nauvoo*, features Joseph's vision in four poems in a section called "First Vision." In the first section, "Questions (Winter 1819-20)," young Joseph Smith asks a number of rhetorical questions, ranging from "How does one know when destiny / Begins a new course?" and "Of all the churches which is truly / That of God? / How does one know which pastor / Has the truth?" In "The

Place," the second poem, Young follows the boy to the woods he knows best, to "places [which] heal and comfort / And make whole." The in "The Vision," the third poem:

There, on that spring day
He found a place
No eye could see
And, falling on his knees,
Began to ask of God
The truth. (18)

After Joseph's confrontation with evil, Young announces the vision with one terse line: "God Spake!"; then, alternating between lyrical soaring and clipped, terse lines, he relates:

Two Beings stood in air
Above his head.
. . . .
One spoke:
This is my Beloved Son,
Hear him!
Like some vast organ swell
His voice ran pure and free
Echoing through the forest,
Filling the vast reaches of eternity.
Gone now was fear,
Terror was no more.
The boy spoke as a boy,
A simple question asked:
Which church is right?
Swift was the reply:
In my sight all have
Gone astray;
None are right. (19)

The fourth poem in "The Vision" section, perhaps the best of the sequence, follows Joseph "Out of the Forest." The youth leaves "these forest woods / Made sacred by this visit, / This revelation of the great eternal God / And his exalted Son." As the becoming prophet threads his way, "His lonely way / Toward his destiny," Young notes simply, "In such a simple way / Eternal work begins" (20).

IV

In fiction as well, Joseph Smith's account of the First Vision casts a long, if infrequent, shadow. Again, Joseph Smith plays a secondary role in numerous novels, including *The Mormon Prophet*

(1899), Lily Dougall's little-known, surprisingly well-written, unusual, turn-of-century novel, which treats of Joseph Smith's seductive psychological and hypnotic powers. In fact, Joseph crops up as a presence in numerous works of fiction: fleetingly, in Judith Freeman's *The Chinchilla Farm* (79); heroically and lovingly in Dean Hughes's historical novel for young readers, *Under the Same Stars* (16); wonderingly, in Sharon Downing Jarvis's *The Kaleidoscope Season* (306-07); influentially, in Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower than The Angels*; importantly, in Paul Bailey's *For This My Glory* (128-33); pivotally, in Ruth Louise Partridge's little-known but impressive historical novel *Other Drums*, in which Joseph alludes to the First Vision, while confessing to Nancy Rigdon that he had plunged into wild currents: "I opened the sluices myself in a wood when I asked wisdom of God as my Bible advised me." He adds, sagely, "Never pray to God for enlightenment, Sister Nancy, unless you are prepared to take the consequences" (271-72).

Most writers of modern fiction who venture to employ the First Vision in their stories generally do so in order to ground their tales in historical and spiritual Mormonism. And, again, the vision becomes a touchstone for the characters' faith in Mormonism. Typical of such use of Joseph and the First Vision is Maurine Whipple's introduction of the First Vision into Erastus Snow's ritual catechizing of St. George Saints in their "Sunday evening sing-and-story tell," which begins with Snow's query, "All those here. . . hold up their hands . . . who saw and knew . . . the Prophet Joseph!" After Sister Eardley's testimony that "The Prophet Joseph . . . warn't like no ordinary man. There allus seemed to be a light somewheres inside of him—like a candle behind his eyes . . .," Snow catechizes, "How old was Joseph when he had his first vision?"

A man's reply this time: "He was fifteen, and it was 1820, the year of the great religious revival, and he read in the first chapter of James..."

"Where was this? . . ."

"Manchester, New York—Joseph retired to the sacred grove and kneeled down. . . ."

The old, old story, Clory reports, but suddenly she was feeling the "thick darkness that gathered around"

and hearing the voice from out the blinding light: "This is my beloved Son, Hear Him. . . ." "They draw near me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (70). And so on through the oral recitation of a people who find unity and common purpose in their recitations of the trials and mobbings and expulsions and martyrdoms and uprootings and exoduses and settlings of the nascent church—all centered in and about the First Vision.

As with most early and many late poetic treatments of the vision, most of the fictional renderings of the First Vision are made for didactic and inspirational purposes, for proclaiming and establishing the truth of the Restoration as exemplified in the vision. Two contemporary LDS writers of fiction, Cecilia Jensen and Gerald N. Lund, have woven Joseph Smith's 1838 account almost literally into their novels. Jensen, in her carefully researched and well-written novel, privately published, *Joseph in Palmyra*, utilizes Joseph's recounting exactly but enhances her account by adding a plethora of historical and anthropological detail gleaned from recent scholarship. As with most fictional treatments of the event, Jensen does not follow Joseph into the grove; instead, she follows him to the Reverend Lane's revival, where Joseph concludes to pray. On the evening following the vision, Joseph decides to tell his family, and it is through this recounting of the event that the reader learns the details of the vision:

"Father . . ." Joseph looked from one to the other parent. "Mother. . . This morning I saw the Father and the Son. The living God and his Son, Jesus Christ. They appeared to me." From the utter silence he gathered that no one comprehended what he was telling them. . . .

"Perhaps it would be better to start at the beginning."

Joseph then recounts his spiritual struggles, his visit to Dr. Lane's revival meeting, his determination to pray for wisdom, his visit to the grove, the presence of evil, and his calling on God for deliverance. Joseph continues:

Again he paused, almost oblivious to those around him as he recalled the sudden glory of his release from the darkness. "At that moment," he continued softly, "I saw light above me: a pillar of light exactly over my head, brighter than the sun. At that moment I found

myself released from that awful power."

No one spoke. In the intense silence, he went on. "As the light drew nearer, the brightness increased. And when it reached the treetops the whole area came alive with light. I expected the leaves and boughs to just burn up. But when this did not happen, I thought I would be all right. Descending slowly, the light rested on me."

He paused, wishing he had words to describe the experience. Then he continued. "It produced a peculiar sensation throughout my whole body. Immediately my mind was caught away from the natural objects about me. I was caught up in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages, who looked exactly like each other. . . . One called my name, and then pointed to the other, and said, 'This is my beloved Son. Hear him.'"

. . . In the shadowy candlelight, Joseph saw the awe in their faces. (8-11, 18-22)

In a technique reminiscent of Cecilia Jensen's, Gerald N. Lund, in *Pillar of Light*, Volume 1 in his landmark saga of the Restoration, *The Work and the Glory*, has Joseph recount the First Vision in words lifted from Joseph's 1838 account—a technique that troubles Eugene England in his *This People* review of the book, but which immediately placates the majority of readers, who would be as unlikely to tolerate another rendering of Joseph's vision as Christians would be to suffer any real linguistic liberties with such of Christ's words as "Peace, be still," "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," or "It is finished."

In *Pillar of Light*, Lund's Joseph Smith tells the story of his First Vision to Nathan Steed, characterizing himself in the conversation but, more importantly for Lund's prefaced purpose, characterizing young Nathan Steed, and eventually each member of the Steed family, through their various responses to Joseph's theophany. Lund's purpose is to lead readers to confront the question, "How would I have responded to Joseph Smith, if he had told me he had seen a vision?"

Joseph begins his relation by telling the young man, "I'll not ask you to believe what I'm about to tell you, Nathan," and describes the camp-meeting fervor in their neighborhood in 1820, his reading of James 1, and his determination to ask God which church he should join.

"And?" Nathan pressed.

"By now it was early in the spring of 1820. . . . It was a beautiful clear morning. I went into the

woods, and making sure I was alone, I immediately knelt down to pray. . . . To my amazement, I found I couldn't utter a word. It was as though my tongue was swollen in my head."

Nathan blinked. This was not what he had expected to hear.

"Suddenly I thought I heard footsteps behind me, someone walking towards me in the dry leaves. I was startled. I whipped around." Now at last he looked up, directly into Nathan's eyes. "No one was there."

Nathan felt a sudden chill run up and down his spine. . . .

After describing the onslaught of the powers of darkness, Joseph continues:

"At the very moment of my deepest despair, as I was about to abandon myself to destruction, at that precise moment, I saw a pillar of light."

Nathan's head snapped up.

Joseph went on steadily now, speaking slowly but with great earnestness. "It was exactly over my head. It was far brighter than the sun at noonday. The light was so intense I thought the very leaves would burst into flame. It descended gradually until it fell upon me. Instantly, the moment the light touched me, I was delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me, I saw two personages—" He stopped, noting the expression on Nathan's face. "I saw two personages," he continued firmly, "whose glory and brightness defy all description. They were standing above me in the air."

Now it was Nathan who involuntarily passed a hand across his eyes. A pillar of light! Two personages?

"The one spoke," Joseph continued, softly now, and more slowly, as though giving Nathan time to digest the words. "He called me by name. 'Joseph,' he said, 'this is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!'"

He stopped, watching Nathan closely.

Nathan's mind was reeling. "Are you saying . . ." He faltered, overwhelmed. "You mean you saw . . ." He could not bring himself to say it.

Joseph nodded with the utmost solemnity. "I saw God and I saw his Son, Jesus Christ." He sighed, suddenly weary. "I know how that must sound to you. But I say again, Nathan, and I say it with all the power of my soul: I saw the Father and I saw his Son."

. . . Nathan leaned back, totally astonished. He could only nod.

Lund then turns Joseph into the teacher leading Nathan through the received standard LDS lessons to be gained from the vision:

"What did God look like?" Nathan's voice was

barely a whisper. "I mean, was he a—" He stopped, groping for an adequate word.

"A person?"

"Yes."

"Yes, Nathan. Most assuredly yes, though a personage of glory and majesty beyond belief. But yes, Nathan, God is a person. When he said he created man in his own image, I know now what he meant. He looks like us—" He shook it off. "No, *we look like him!* He is a person. He is our Father. . . ." He stopped. In the distance a meadowlark was calling out its last evening song. The breeze was picking up now, making a soft rustling noise as it danced across the meadow. The stream gurgled cheerfully as it ran past them. But Nathan was aware of none of this. His mind was a wild tumble of thoughts and emotions. (52-60)

Lund, better than anyone to date, has, without doing violence to the reader's respect for the Prophet Joseph, skillfully brought the historical and revered Joseph into conversation with a fictitious and believable Nathan, who vicariously serves in the reader's stead (thus *Steed?*), and melded canonical text with imagined conversation and Nathan's imagined responses to quicken a familiar text with personal meaning. I believe that Lund, in *Pillar of Light* and in the six volumes that have followed, has done a credible job of unshackling himself from the chains of historical tyranny, articulating and reifying the First Vision and other early events of the Restoration for another *fin de siècle* generation. Through Lund's imaginative yet orthodox revitalizing of the Prophet, "millions shall know 'Brother Joseph' again."

V

Although Vardis Fisher, in *Children of God* (1938), faithfully follows Joseph's sequence in recounting the First Vision, his essentially poetical handling of the vision renders a fresh interpretation of the vision and leads us to consideration of recent uses of the vision as literary points of departure, as treatments that open to readers new and different meanings of the experience, meanings that incorporate not only the Church but the individual. Fisher leads us to a passionate Joseph, who is almost astonished to find himself

kneeling here in leaf-depth, and speaking in impassioned wonder to a great blue pasture with its solitary golden sun. After a little, he knew there were tears in his eyes

and tears wet and running on his cheeks as the whole world listened to the anxious humble asking of his voice. . . ." (392)

Then the vision bursts upon him:

He saw first an intimation of brightness far out in the universe; it grew like the softness of morning, like a gentle flowering out of utter darkness, as if heaven were overflowing the wastelands of night as brilliance spilled from God's robe as He walked. For a long moment the light spread and gathered strength and then suddenly fell downward in a broad beam of terrible splendor, in a great and blinding pillar that touched the earth and lay far out in a white column of eternity. Then, with startling swiftness, two persons appeared in this stupendous shaft of light, the Father and the Son; and they were exactly alike in countenance and in the incandescence of their glory. They walked down the beam as down a highway of light; and one called the prostrate lad by name and pointed to his companion and said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" The Son spoke. He declared in the voice of a great organ that all the creeds of earth were an abomination in His sight. . . . The voice died away in echoes that rolled in solemn music, and the highway of light slowly faded, with Father and Son standing as vanishing silhouettes against the infinite. The light closed like a shutter to a thin wraith of holiness and slowly withdrew to the lone glittering point of a star. (392-93)

Vardis Fisher's poetic liberties with the First Vision prefigure the tendency, quickened in recent years, to extend, far beyond Fisher's tentative poetic soarings, the symbolic universal and mythic qualities inherent in the First Vision; to loosen the tight grip of the historical boundaries and probe the Sacred Grove experience for universal meanings other than suggested in traditional uses of the vision; to see in the vision the pattern of individual steps toward conversion, the pattern of God's relationship with human beings—the democratizing and universalizing of the experience; the likening "of the scriptures unto us," as Nephi counsels, ". . . for our profit and learning" (1 Ne. 19:23); the enabling, as illuminated by the First Vision, of each man and woman to enter his or her own Sacred Grove, to gain that "testimony of Jesus, which is," says John in Revelation, "the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).

Poetry enables Allie Howe, for example, to celebrate the First Vision by melding the event with

nature in poetic association, with nature playing the role of harbinger:

A wisp of the new morning
Washes across his face
And turns him
To wooded temples,

Where,
Ancient in days, the awakening mother
Lifts
Against his suppliant knees;
And a breath above,
Reigning all the space around,
The Holiest of Holies
Unveil

And Joseph sups from Their Presence . . .

Robert P. Tristram Coffin, who published his poem "The Mormons" in 1939, was in the vanguard of those who treat the First Vision as a symbolic entry to other meanings. In the "Mormonism is over" impulse of literature of the 1930s made popular by the "Lost Generation" of Mormon writers, Coffin, not a Mormon, symbolizes the vision as the invigorating force of Mormonism, a force continued in Brigham Young but dissolving as the Saints settle into staid and visionless materialism:

Joseph Smith, when he was young,
Saw a golden censer swung,

In the sunset saw two wings
Full of eyes and shining things.

Among the pumpkins in a field
He found a great book, seven-sealed.

Treading furrows Joseph trod
Walked a twilit, comely god. . . .

But,

. . . the new age caught them up.
Stilled the psaltery, drained the cup

Mormon's wings grew heavy lead,
And he sank his graying head. . . .

All the million eyes grew dim
With the age that crept on him.

Gone the tents and wives and pride,
And the youngest god had died.

Latter-day Saint poets have also begun, in recent years, to wax imaginative in using the First Vision as point of departure, infusing their poems with the visionary spirit, and probing for implications of Joseph's experience in individual lives. Bruce Wayne Jorgensen, in "The Light Come Down," extends the borders of the First Vision by shrinking the canvas. In his striking poem, Jorgensen first re-tells the vision as folk-ballad:

Just a dusty country boy
Praying in the trees,
Knocked out flat and speechless,
Again upon on his knees
And the light come down,
Lord, the light come down.

Sharper than suns he sweated in,
It slapped that April mud,
It withered the one that threatened him
And stunned him where he stood.
Yes, the light come down,
Lord, it did come down.

And he was just fourteen,
Mixed up, and read your book
And took you at your word
And asked—and Lord,
You let the light come down,
O Lord, a-comin down.

Then, placing Joseph and his vision in the larger context of God's dealings with his mortal children, Jorgensen continues:

Old Adam had a farmer's son
And Abraham did too—
All made of mud but you made em good
And brought em home to you,
For the light come down,
It always did come down.

The poet then urges the Lord to

. . . look down on country boys
That stink and puzzle and pray,
And strike the light to blind their sight
And make their night your day.

Finally, connecting the First Vision to the lives of all of God's children who seek light, Jorgensen concludes,

And bless you, Lord, for country boys,
Each hungry mother's son
Treading the furrow his father plowed
Just like your single son
 When you and him come down,
 When you the light come down.

Perhaps the most imaginative and complex poetic rendering of the First Vision is found in Emma Lou Thayne's three-part pantoum, "Meditations on the Heaven":

Angel wings are on the beach
I found one shining in the sand
One late night looking for the comet
We'd been told would be near Pleiades.

Thayne transforms the "ancient icon [of angel wings] like the comet's head" into a "celestial body grounded for our view," which becomes, in turn, an icon representing the light of Joseph Smith's First Vision and containing the patterned repetition of lines characteristic of the pantoum:

Suppose he really saw the vision, God, the angel
My church owns the story: Joseph in the grove,
 fourteen,
A supernatural sight of extraordinary beauty and
 significance
While praying for a truth that had eluded others.

My church owns the story: Joseph in the grove,
 fourteen
Not unlike Joan, young Buddha, or Mohammed
While praying for a truth that had eluded others
From unusual encounter the gift more than
 surprising

...
It had to be believed, the unbelievable

...
Suppose he really saw the vision, God, the angel
More than white on black that no one else could
 see
A supernatural sight of extraordinary beauty and
 significance.

In Section 3, "The Comet Is Remembering," Thayne fuses the comet, the First Vision, and her own girl-

hood memories of a chapel painting of the Sacred Grove to describe the First Vision, which burns with layered density at center of her being, more real than reality:

Not until today this small comet in my scalp:
The clattering of memory; the painting
In the chapel of my childhood against the organ
 loft:
Joseph kneeling at the elevated feet of the
 Father and the Son.

...
... it rose indigenous as music.
Did the artist put it in—the vision—or did I?
In the Sacred Grove, sun streaming on the boy
 at prayer.

...
More real now than the Sacred Grove I occupied
 one grown-up Sunday
Not until today this small comet in my scalp:
Indelible on knowing, like the features of a
 mother giving milk:
In the chapel of my childhood against the organ
 loft: the vision.

VI

While playwrights such as Susan Elizabeth Howe, in *Burdens of Earth*, and Clinton F. Larson in *The Mantle of the Prophet*, do not recreate the First Vision, their vision is informed by the dramatic visionary patterns set in motion in the Sacred Grove and replicated in the lives of Joseph's followers, who can say, with Brigham Young in *The Mantle of the Prophet* on receiving Joseph's actual and spiritual mantles,

Joseph, I feel your ghost, and you have
 delivered me
Over the veil into the velvet plains. . . .
Before me the people feel the breath of your
 being:

...
And they weep for the mission before us
And the scroll of the covenants you wrote upon. . . .
Joseph, . . . you are with me in the mission
You brought me to, that I cannot deny. (44-45)

This same mantic/spiritual quality, this visionary template overlaid on mortal dailinesses, informs much of contemporary Mormon fiction, as it should. Wherever one looks in contemporary Mormon

fiction, one finds, at the crux of these fictions, the expectation and reality of supernal intervention that replicates the pattern initiated in Joseph's First Vision. Regardless of the location of the heart of modern Mormon fiction, many writers draw near to Joseph's pattern with their lips—whether it be in the comical appearances of angel-in-the-rough Moroni Skinner to his backsliding grandson, in Samuel W. Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why* (1948); in Amy's "say-so or sense?" dream of a priesthood-dominated heavenly council meeting or in her end-of-book vision of her husband, in Eileen G. Kump's *Bread and Milk* (1979); or in Nephi Nicholes's visionary dreams of his future wife, Eleña, in Jerry M. Young's book of the same name (1992); or in Julie's discomfiting apotheosis in Margaret Blair Young's *Salvador* (1992); or in the visions of several of Levi S. Peterson's characters, from Paul's vision in (not on) "Road to Damascus," and Arabella's vision of the face of God in "Canyons of Grace," to the all-too-real and scratchy presence of the otherworldly in "The Third Nephite," and Frank's anti-type vision of the Cowboy Jesus, in *Backslider* (1986). Mormon fiction is informed by the First—and subsequent—visions; they characterize seeing the world Mormonly.

Orson Scott Card, modern Mormonism's most prolific fictionist, embodies and illustrates the concept. Card's *Lost Boys* (1992), his first so-called "mainstream" novel, is centered—or concluded—in supernal realities. In his still-in-progress *The Tales of Alvin Maker* series, Card transforms the whole religion-engendering story of Joseph Smith into a fantasy world driven by magic and folklore, as Alvin Miller, Jr., seventh son and Maker and thus a destined adversary of the Unmaker, experiences an initiating vision in which he sees the Shining Man standing at the foot of his bed. In *Red Prophet* we learn a rational explanation of the vision from the Shaw-Nee Indian Prophet, Lolla-Wossiky, but only after the apparent vision has launched Alvin into a number of remarkable revelations and white-magic miracles. In a related kind of imaginative soaring, Card is also busy transforming 1 Nephi into parallel world fantasy, in his *Memories of Earth* series, featuring Nephi and his brothers and father—and, more importantly, the powerful matriarch.

The First Vision is likewise obliquely important in Card's historical novel *Saints*. Dinah Kirkham

Handy Smith, an English convert to Mormonism and later teacher of the Smith children and plural wife to Joseph, undergoes her own first vision later in the same evening after Elder Heber C. Kimball has related Joseph's First Vision. In her vision, a departure from Joseph's, Dinah sees the face of God, "the perfect man," but the face is that of Joseph Smith: "It was to this person that she spoke, he was the one who heard her." While undressing for bed later that night, Dinah is swept into a sensual vision of the face of Joseph:

Father, she said softly. Father, Father, Father. She was a young farmboy lying on a bed in his father's house in America, longing for something, knowing it would not come, expecting it to arrive any moment.

The feeling grew and grew until she could not bear it. The light also grew within her, until at last she could see it, a whiteness reaching from her to fill the room. She heard her words become audible, and she finally realized that her angel would not come and stand outside her in the air, that the angel would be within her, and her own lips would speak the message she was meant to hear. . . . And she heard her own voice fall silent and the other voice at last speak in answer, speak from those perfect lips only one thing: "I am," said the voice [of Joseph]; . . . sleeping but feeling herself awake forever, the sun and moon and stars all within her body, the leaves of the trees so large that she could stand between them and watch them grow to infinity so that she could touch the stars that dwelt within them, too. "I am," said the voice. So slowly. And Dinah answered, silently, "I know."

Dinah gains, through her own affirming vision, the testimony of the Restoration she has resisted; she therefore retraces the dynamic and visionary path to light and truth that Joseph Smith's First Vision exemplifies and patterns for his people.

VII

In 1847, three years after the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., at Carthage, Illinois, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, after attending a Mormon service in Lowell, Massachusetts:

Once in the world's history we were to have a Yankee prophet, and we have had him in Joe Smith. For good or for evil, he has left his track on the great pathway of life; [and] "knocked out for himself a window in the wall of the nineteenth century," whence his rude, bold, good-humored face will peer out upon the generations to come.

While Joseph Smith, Jr., continues to "peer out" at millions through the window of his First Vision, the First Vision enables millions to peer back in confirming Joseph as the prophet of God. And while his recounting of that event in the Sacred Grove remains the center pillar of Mormonism, it has taken on increasing personal and mythic dimensions and evolved as a spiritual dynamic model. Joseph's narrative and the increasing number of literary renderings of that narrative suggest individual patterns for seeking personal revelation from God—a spiritual dynamic vital to the Latter-day Saint who seeks, through the ministry of the Holy Ghost, both personal witness and direction. The First Vision and its various treatments in Mormon letters enable individual Latter-day Saints to soar on eagle wings of effable words and images to ineffable insight and understanding, bringing human beings nearer to the goal: to "know . . . the only true and living God" (John 17:3) and enabling "millions," as the Saints hymn in "Praise to the Man," to "know 'Brother Joseph' again."

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NOTES

1. See also Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984): 3-8; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971).
2. "The Vision from Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps, Esq.," first published in the *Times and Seasons* and later in the *Millennial Star* 4 (August 1843): 4; also in N. B. Lundwall, comp., *The Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.). See Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, 258-66, for the first suggestion that the poem is by Phelps. Michael Hicks, "Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and the Poetic Paraphrase of the 'The Vision,'" *Journal of Mormon History* 20.2 (Fall 1994): 63-84, marshals the evidence for Phelps as the sole author of the poem.
3. Bushman insists that Joseph's failure to tell the vision to his parents "gave Lucy a misunderstanding of the sequence of Joseph's vision that she had trouble correcting," and forced her to resort, in her own history, to citing Joseph's already extant description of the vision (58).

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Orson F. Whitney and the Consecration of Poetry

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Upon his death in 1931, Orson F. Whitney was one of only a handful of figures in Utah recognized by virtually everyone. He had served for twenty-eight years as the bishop of the ward he raised in. He was an important political leader, the great defender of women's suffrage—opposed by B. H. Roberts—in Utah's constitutional convention; a prominent newspaper editor and reporter; Chancellor of the University of Deseret; Assistant Church Historian; a sought-after church speaker and political orator; and an Apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1906 to 1931. He was even a radio personality of sorts. In addition to all of his other qualities, he was also the most prominent Utah poet of his age. He was among the most visible—and the ablest—defenders of the arts and literary culture in Zion.

Sixty-five years later all that has changed. Today, Whitney's life and work are relegated at best to the interest of the odd master's degree candidate, archivist, descendant, or simple scholar looking for a topic for the AML conference. It may be, of course, in a culture that values living apostles, that a nostalgic look at a distant disciple is of relatively little worth. But I would like to try to let Whitney's work convince you otherwise. Of all Whitney's accomplishments, his unique combination of poetic talent, love for literature, and love for the truths of the gospel, as they manifest themselves in his writing, are still worthy of our study. Whitney stands out among writers of his generation because of his willingness and ability to consecrate his poetic and other gifts on the altar of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

My purpose will be to present examples of Whitney's "theory," if you will, of consecration—both to what and how one consecrates and then to present examples of his own poetry in relation to the models

he followed. Allow me to turn first to his lovely autobiography—*Through Memory's Halls*. This grandson of two very prominent early Mormons—Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney and Heber C. Kimball, first counselor to Brigham Young—was born in the Salt Lake Valley in 1855. It was soon apparent that he had the talent and temperament of an artist. He wanted to become an actor. In the earliest grades, he amazed his schoolmates with his near photographic memory. He also reports developing good skills at declaiming. In his late teens he won the Salt Lake Thirteenth Ward Sabbath School's prize for best recitation—a handsome copy of the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. A second prize, "something just as good," went to his friend and competitor, Heber J. Grant (66-67).

Perhaps his most important gift, however, was his sensitive soul. He describes himself as

exceedingly sensitive, quick to feel an injury or a slight. . . I could also forgive on the least show of kindness or a desire to conciliate. . . I felt everything so keenly. A word or even a look could comfort me or cast me down. I regretted this phase of my disposition until taught by experience and reason that the power to feel is a precious possession; that sensitiveness is not a curse, but a blessing, since they who suffer most can also enjoy most. (26-27)

Whitney's sensitivity increased his spiritual and poetic temperament—intensity of emotion and sensation being crucial to art and religion.

October 1876 brought the event that intensified and transformed his sense of consecration. "The General Conference of the Church convened, and I was called on a mission to the United States" (67). Reflecting back on his mission experience, Whitney was to say, "My muse had hardly tried her wings as

yet, but evidently there was poetry in me . . . and my mission was trying to bring it out" (75). Something about his service in Pennsylvania and Ohio, the early home of his grandfathers and the Church, his poetic "Land of Shineeah," brought his art to life. Certainly it was associated with family. More definitely, it was the brooding presence of Joseph Smith in the area. But a dream he had while laboring in Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, illustrates the mighty change in his life.

In the dream, Whitney, standing behind a tree, saw the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane with his three disciples just before the crucifixion. He witnessed the prayer and the sleeping disciples, just as described in scripture. "As He prayed the tears streamed down his face, which was toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I also wept, out of pure sympathy. My whole heart went out to him; I loved him with all my soul, and longed to be with him as I longed for nothing else" (82). The dream continues with the Savior's gentle rebuke of his disciple friends as they sleep during his anguish.

"All at once," Whitney reports, the scene changed to a place and time following the resurrection. Jesus is still with his disciples but they are preparing to ascend into heaven. Again in Whitney's beautiful words:

I could endure it no longer. I ran from behind the tree, fell at his feet, clasped Him around the knees, and begged Him to take me with him.

I shall never forget the kind and gentle manner in which He stooped, raised me up, and embraced me. It was so vivid, so real. I felt the very warmth of his body, as He held me in his arms and said in tenderest tones: "No, my son; these have finished their work; they can go with me; but you must stay and finish yours." Still I clung to Him. Gazing up into his face—for He was taller than I—I besought Him fervently: "Well, promise me that I will come to you at the last." Smiling sweetly, He said: "That will depend entirely upon yourself." (83)

Following the dream, Whitney was "never the same man again." At about the same time Brigham Young wrote and advised him to "cultivate what he called 'my gift for writing.' 'So that you can use it,' he said, 'for the establishment of truth and righteousness'" (82). Using writing for those ends is the

essence of Whitney's consecration. For the rest of his life, he seldom spoke of poetry without reference to prophecy, truth, and the Lord. As he wrote,

Life was no longer a mystery . . . By the light of God's Candle—the Gift of the Holy Ghost—I saw what till then I had never seen, learned what till then I had never known. My soul was satisfied. My joy was full; for I had a testimony of the Truth, and it has remained with me to this day. (91)

Whitney returned home determined to become a newspaper man, but on the Lord's terms, not the world's. He turned down an editorial position with the *Salt Lake Herald* that would have required Sunday work and instead became a bill collector for the *Deseret Evening News*. Within a year of his return, single and age twenty-three, he was called to be bishop of the Eighteenth Ward.

His adult life brought Whitney's writing more into focus. At the same time, he began to give serious thought to the role and status of poetry in Utah and the Church. He published more than twenty articles, some in as many as five installments, extolling literature and poetry. He explained how poetry worked and was to be read. He argued forcefully for including poetry in the culture of the Saints. He regularly quoted Byron, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Carlyle in support of the truth he loved. At the same time, he argued that the truth of Mormonism required a glorious art, a true poetry, to proclaim its heavenly ideals. If poetry was among the highest human achievements, then the truths of the gospel revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith should be presented to the world in great poems. He asserted that poetry was next to prophecy in its ability to comprehend the truth. And if not all poetry were prophecy, prophecy was nonetheless always poetry.

At the same time, Whitney's testimony was never far from his love of poetry. His exciting essay on "Joseph Smith in Literature," illustrates this point. This essay, published in the *Improvement Era*, the predecessor of today's *Ensign*, has two dominant themes. The first is poetry's place in the kingdom of God. The second is Joseph Smith's rightful place in the world as a true poet/prophet.

We learn from the essay that Whitney is unafraid

to make audacious assertions about Mormonism's truth and the poetry through which it is expressed:

The gift of poesy and the gift of prophecy are akin. . . . The highest poetry is prophetic; there is always in it a suggestion of infinity. . . . The book of Job, the writings of Isaiah, the parables and sayings of the Savior, the solemn and sublime melody of the Apocalypse. Are they not poems as well as prophecies, and were not their authors among the greatest of the sons of song? (136-37)

Learning is another name for literature. In counseling his people to "seek learning," therefore, this supposedly ignorant and illiterate man [Joseph Smith] was virtually advising them to cultivate literature. The "best books" here mentioned do not mean merely the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, Church works and religious writings, though these must ever lie at the basis of "Mormon" literature. History, poetry, philosophy, art and science, languages, laws, and the principles of government,—all truth, in short, is included in that comprehensive phrase. Yes, it even means inspiration, revelation; for does it not say: "Seek learning by study, and *also* by faith?" (139; emphasis Whitney's)

If such poetry is at the very core of the restored gospel, then any meaningful description of Joseph must include the title "poet." Whitney again is unafraid of affirming the consequent:

But [Joseph Smith] had to have the poetic instinct, the poetic insight—the power to recognize, comprehend and interpret the mystery of life, the mystery of the universe; a power inherent in prophecy, in the sacred gift of seership, with which he was so eminently endowed. This was what made him a poet. (137)

Chosen himself in weakness, so far as this world's wisdom was concerned, as a foundation stone of the mighty structure that is destined to tower heavenward, reflecting from polished walls and glittering spires the splendors of eternity, he knew there must come a time, unless One who cannot lie had sworn falsely, when Zion, as the head and front of a world's civilization, would arise and shine, "the joy of the whole earth," the seat of learning, the source of wisdom, and the centre of political power; when, side by side with pure religion, would flourish art and science, her fair daughters; when music, poetry, painting, sculpture,

oratory and the drama—rays of light from the same central sun, no longer refracted and discolored by the many-hued prisms of man's sensuality—would throw their white radiance full and direct upon the mirror-like glory of her towers; when the science of earth and the wisdom of heaven would walk hand in hand, interpreting each other; when philosophy would drink from wells of living truth, no longer draining the deadly hemlock of error, to poison the pure air with the illusions of sophistry; when Zion's sons and Zion's daughters, as famed for intelligence and culture as for beauty, would entertain kings and nobles, would sit upon thrones themselves, or go forth as shafts of light from the bow of the Almighty, as messengers and ambassadors to the nations!

Joseph saw all this; he knew it was inevitable . . . (138)

One might easily demand more proof of the Prophet's poet-hood from Whitney than the simple possession of magnificent vision, even the gift of seership. Those among us with even the slightest bit of common sense know a poet when we see one. Poets publish their poems. If Joseph Smith was a poet, where did he write his poems down? Where do I find some of his verse? After quoting pages and pages of modern revelation from the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, Whitney answers our question:

"What poem did Joseph Smith produce?" He produced the great poem called "Mormonism," the greatest and sublimest epic ever conceived and brought forth by the mind of man.

. . . And yet he was not the great fulfilment. He stands upon the shoulders of the earlier seers. But above and beyond all, is Christ, the Creator, the divine Author of this divinest of poems, which, sounded as a prophecy in pre-existent spheres, finds its fullest human expression in the heaven-inspired song sung by the Prophet of the Last Dispensation. (153)

Not content just to take on Gentile criticism of Joseph, however, Whitney also challenges some of Joseph's followers. We Mormons are, after all, just as prone to the literalist temptations of fundamentalism as any. To their concern that scripture is, after all, the "word" of God and not the product of the feeble mind of man, he responds with second-generation Mormon pragmatism:

It may be objected that these revelations are God's utterances, and therefore, not the words nor the works of Joseph Smith. I answer that they are God's and Joseph's combined. The Prophet was not a mere machine, a mere speaking trumpet, in the process of receiving and giving the word of God. He still had his agency, and was an intelligent, self-acting being, though the inspired instrument and mouthpiece of God. The word of God that came to him was independent of him, and yet his mind was the mold in which it was formed; his vocabulary the earthly vehicle of expression. That which was divinely begotten may have human conception and delivery. (142)

Whitney explained how and why poetry and the gospel were so closely connected in two other essays in the *Improvement Era*, "Poetry and Its Mission" and "Oratory, Poetry, and Prophecy." With succinct definitions, he implicates his own enthusiastic idealism with what excites him about poetry and truth—the capital "T" Truth of Mormonism:

The essence of poetry is in thought, sentiment, symbolism, and the power of suggestion. It is the music of ideas, as well as the music of language. Many a verse, perfect in rhyme and metre, has little or no poetry, while prose is oftentimes replete with it. (530)

Poesy is the power by which we appreciate and sympathize with all that is good, pure, true, beautiful and sublime. That high sense of right which scorns all wrong; the sword and balance of Eternal Justice; the voice of Mercy pleading for the fallen; the tongue of truth heralding salvation and reform; the oracle of Liberty proclaiming freedom to the oppressed; the thunderbolt of retribution that lays the tyrant low;—poesy is the Spirit of these things. (628)

Poetry is music—the music of languages; but that is not all, or most. It is the music of thought, the melody of sentiment, the harmony of the human with the divine; deep answering to deep, man's soul attuned to and in union with the mind and heart of the melodious universe. (628)

At times, Whitney almost forces his Mormonism on his poetry. In the following passage he takes an important principle of Mormon doctrine, the conjunction of body and spirit to form the soul, and

from it creates an analogy by which to evaluate the relative quality of poems:

There is, however, a subtle and essential relation between poetic sentiment and rhythmical expression. The spirit must have a body, a fitting one; and the two combined constitute the soul. This is just as true of a poem as it is of a man or woman. Let it not be overlooked, either, that the sentiment is the spirit, the most important part; while the language—rhyme, rhythm and all—is only the body of the poem, necessary, not to its existence, but to its perfection, as a finished product of inspired art. Nor be it forgotten that the body without the spirit is dead, being alone. This is the case with much that is called poetry. It is all body and no spirit. ("Poetry and Its Mission," 1046)

In a similar vein, Whitney often emphasizes the symbolic power of poetic imagery to transport the believing reader beyond the earth toward the purer truths of heaven.

The highest quality that any poem can possess—be it dramatic, epic, or lyric—is suggestiveness, the power to call up in the mind of the reader or auditor something beyond itself, something in advance of his or her surroundings. (1047)

The Gospel of the Christ is a poetic, because prophetic, scheme for human progress and exaltation. Its principles and ordinances are fraught with symbolism—the very essence of poetry. (1048)

Do I err, then, in believing that the universe is built upon symbols, to the end that it may bear record of its all-wise Architect and Builder? God teaches with symbols; it is his favorite method of teaching. The Savior often used them. On one occasion he wished to inculcate the lesson of trust in God, for the benefit of his disciples, who evidently feared that if they left their bread-winning avocations [*sic*] and went forth preaching the Gospel, they would not get food to eat or clothing to wear. Pointing to the flowers at the roadside, Jesus said: "Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, will he not clothe you, O ye of little faith?" He was using the flowers to symbolize his servants, and impress upon them the sublime

lesson that Providence is over all. ("Latter-day Saint Ideals and Institutions," 861-62.)

To those who may have objected to Whitney's idealism—his faith, as it were, in the enduring quality of poetry and its ability to lift fallen humanity and point us all toward celestial heights—Whitney offered a stern warning. He sensed toward the end of his life that Mormon culture and poetry were diverging. More than that, I suspect he knew something of the disconnectedness of poetic modernism in the 1920s and the everyday idealism that inspired, informed, and supported his deepest beliefs. He foresaw that poetry's rejection of idealism might in turn lead to Mormon culture's rejection of poetry as a medium of faith. I suspect he would have read with dismay the notice not long ago in the *Ensign* that poetry would no longer be a regular feature of the magazine, an official announcement of the marginalization of poetry for faithful Latter-day Saints. I present two longer quotations:

The reason some people have no taste for poetry, is because they can't eat it, nor wear it as a hat or coat. They are forever thinking of the body and its needs—its food and apparel. They forget that they have minds, hearts, and spirits, that must be clothed and fed lest they starve and perish. Poetry is supposed by them to represent the ideal exclusively—something impractical, or of no particular use; while commerce, politics, and such like factors and forces, stand for the practical or real.

But the poetic and the practical are not necessarily at variance; they are close kin and ought to be firm friends. ("Mission," 1050)

The second quotation is the most chilling I ran across. It is by no means Eliot's "The Hollow Men," but it is definitely the voice of an idealist under duress.

Before poetry can die, the human heart must change—must lose its innate love of rhythm and cadence—the human heart, that pedestal of Homer's fame, that immovable basis of Shakespeare's overmastering triumph. . . . When the great sea, with its constant surge and swing of poetic sound and motion, shall no longer chant its solemn harmonies to the answering winds and the choring stars; when the soul of man shall cease to yearn for the infinite—satisfied with, because smothered be-

neath, the sordid time-servings of a greedy, godless, pleasure-loving, money-worshipping generation; when the real can make progress and attain perfection without the ideal as an incentive to righteous endeavor, then, nor till then, will poetry be out of date, and have no mission among the sons of men. (1053-54)

It is sobering to consider that our cultures' (both low- and high-brow) current rejection of idealistic poetry just might be a reflection of a society of once good people now become "smothered beneath the sordid time-servings of a greedy, godless, pleasure-loving, money-worshipping generation." We may have become such hardened realists that we can no longer raise our eyes above the daily drivel served up by the shocking or the bland, both of which are uninspiringly mediocre.

I'm certain that I have now unfairly raised your expectations as to the quality of Whitney's own poems. They do not soar as high as his idealism, but they are not examples of silly moralizing either. His poems, at their best, fit comfortably into the genre of didactic poetry that flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England and America, whose practitioners included everyone from Wordsworth to Tennyson and Bryant to Whittier, with Emerson somewhere in between. Our current taste for Brown-ing, Hopkins, or Whitman notwithstanding, these are very good poems.

The subjects of the poems fall across three very broad categories: devotion to the restored gospel, devotion to Utah and the Church, and devotion to America and its principles of liberty. The forms range from fairly simple lyric poems, many of which were put to music and included in LDS hymnals, to longer narrative poems, including the verse romance *Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland*, to his crowning achievement *Elias: An Epic of the Ages*.

I will offer brief examples of good poems by more famous authors against which to measure the quality of similar ones by Whitney. Through these comparisons, it will become apparent that Whitney's poems often lack the formal complexity and variety of musical devices typical of the best nineteenth-century didactic poetry. At the same time, we will also see that Whitney's ideas are not simplistic. He does not want to hide gospel truth behind simplified versions of "the truth." I will present portions of

three poems, a hymn, a narrative, and a selection from *Elias*, in contrast to poems by Bryant and Whittier, to illustrate my point.

Hymn 403 in the 1927 hymnal is a simple reminder of one of my favorite scenes in the entire Book of Mormon. In my limited experience, I have not encountered another Mormon poem quite like it. It tries to re-create the sublime simplicity of the account in 3 Nephi when Jesus blesses the children of the survivors of the great destruction as they meet with him near the temple in the Land Bountiful. The hymn book calls it by the first line: "Arrayed in Light."

Arrayed in light,
Than day more bright,
Haloed with heav'nly flame,
Adown the sky,
From worlds on high,
The glorious Saviour came,
The glorious Saviour came.

Enraptured stood
The multitude,
Beholding Him their King,
At whose command,
The chosen band,
Their little children bring,
Their little children bring.

O'erlooking none,
The Gracious One
His blessing on them seals;
And tears now prove,
The wealth of love,
His tenderness reveals,
His tenderness reveals.

Angels descend,
The heavens rend,
And pour celestial fires.
Each tiny tongue,
Amid the throng,
The Holy Gift inspires,
The Holy Gift inspires.

O joy supreme!
O golden gleam
Of glory yet to be!
That day sublime,
Thy coming time,
Dear Saviour, may I see!
Dear Saviour, may I see!

Whitney faces a number of difficulties just by trying to write this hymn. The first is that hymns must be simple—but they must also approach the sublime. The combination of lyric and music should intensify our understanding and emotion with regard to the sacred event they describe. A less courageous disciple would probably back away from it. The event includes children, so the language must suggest holy innocence and purity without being cloying or naive.

A greater difficulty comes from the fact that the Book of Mormon account on which the hymn is based has already achieved those purposes, without the music. Whitney desires to take the Book of Mormon story, a unique account of the Savior's special love for little children, and present it in a hymn that will allow the highly personal spiritual experience of reading to be shared in a congregation unified by singing. It is a lofty goal and not quite achieved.

The hymn has two weaknesses typical of Whitney's work. The first is diction. Whitney's diction strains to be "transcendent," as the words "Adown" and "Enraptured" attest. Whitney often allows his "poetic" vocabulary to get in the way of simple meanings. He sometimes pursues the ostentation of oratory at the expense of poetry. The second is Whitney's penchant for using, almost exclusively, masculine rhymes. The strong vowel sounds over-emphasize the last syllables of each line, producing a sing-song effect that diminishes the force of his message.

That said, one must be impressed with the simple beauty of the fourth stanza. Technique does not get in the way of the message:

Angels descend,
The heavens rend,
And pour celestial fires.
Each tiny tongue,
Amid the throng,
The Holy Gift inspires,
The Holy Gift inspires.

This verse allows both meekness and glory to color our perception of the holy event. The movement from heaven to the voice of each child is swift yet delicate. We witness a pentecostal outpouring of the spirit as it touches the tongues of the children

and are inspired ourselves by the poem's grace. This is Whitney at his consecrated best.

In comparison, consider the following verse from William Cullen Bryant's "To a Waterfowl," written in 1815:

There is a Power, whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air,
Lone wandering, but not lost. (Bradley 593)

The purpose of this lovely poem is to inspire the reader to see the care of God for all of us in the instinct that protects migrating birds along their journey. Bryant achieves this purpose with two primary strengths, besides the obvious inspiration of the idea. The first is the voice of the narrator. The speaker knows about God, "a Power," and is unafraid to assert His role in the life of the bird. In fact, the poem becomes a sermon on nature. It invites the reader, as do so many "romantic" poems, to search out the glory of God in His creations. Whitney's purpose in "Arrayed in Light" is just as noble and more concrete in its focus on the interaction of the gloriously resurrected Savior with the children of the Nephites.

Bryant's second strength is his varied use of musical devices. His use of alliteration and assonance is much richer than Whitney's. The "t's," "th's," and "a's" of "Teaches thy way along that pathless coast," for example, emphasize the smooth orderliness of the flight in the music even as the meaning of "pathless coast" implies inability to find a direction or a destination. Whitney's poem begins to approach this musical skill, but it never quite matches Bryant's. The strength of Whitney's poem, finally, is its concrete testimony of the reality of the Savior's resurrection and the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. (A great strength, indeed.)

My second selection is taken from a short allegorical narrative written on the occasion of Utah statehood in 1896: "The Lily and the Bee" (*Voices from the Mountains*, 12-13). The symbols of the honeybee and sego lily are somewhat obvious, yet appropriate to the occasion. They suggest virtue, tried through suffering, emerging triumphant:

A Bee flew forth one fateful morn,
Chased by an idle boy,

Who, fearful lest that busy life
Might his vain life annoy,

Besieged and sacked its honeyed hive,
And gave to wind and flame
The precious fruits of patient toil:
All perished but the name.

The Bee winged far its pilgrim flight
O'er prairie, peak and plain;
It reached the Lily's rock-girt land,
And knew pursuit was vain.

It bent and kissed the drooping flower,
Whose tears to nectar turned,
And sweetened all that bitter land,
By Breeze and Season spurned.

They wedded in the wilderness,—
The Lily and the Bee,
And men maintain 'twas then God gave
The Land to Industry;

Gave Utah to the Pioneer,
Whose patient valor won
Our land to law and liberty
For patriot sire and son.

As partial as the reader may be to this little poem's purpose (and what son or daughter of Utah would not be partial to the story of pioneer fortitude and the wedding of land to industry?), it is by no means perfect. It struggles with some of the same technical flaws that we saw in the hymn, both diction and rhyme. Nonetheless, it captures something of the destruction preceding the exodus of the Saints from Illinois as well as the urgent industry of the Mormons upon their arrival in the Great Basin. It is also a meaningful celebration of the failure of the mobocrat to destroy the Church by destroying the Saints' sanctuaries in the Midwest.

Lest we become a bit too smug in our dismissal of such a small patriotic piece, let us examine a similar poem by John Greenleaf Whittier in praise of the Statue of Liberty:

The Bartholdi Statue

The land, that, from the rule of kings
In freeing us, itself made free,
Our Old World Sister, to us brings
Her sculptured Dream of Liberty:

Unlike the shapes on Egypt's sands
Uplifted by the toil-worn slave,
On Freedom's soil with freemen's hands
We rear the symbols free hands gave.

O France, the beautiful! To thee
Once more a debt of love we owe:

.....
Shine far, shine free, a guiding light
To Reason's ways and Virtue's aim,
A lightning-flash the wretch to smite
Who shields his license with thy name!
(Bradley, 1546-47)

Since Whittier's poem is not an allegory, it may seem strange to compare it with Whitney's. Another circumstance, however, may make the comparison seem a bit more apt. As I previously noted, Whitney's poem was written in celebration of Utah statehood. He submitted it to a contest run as part of the festivities. It lost. Whittier's poem was submitted to a similar contest when the Statue of Liberty was unveiled. It won. In fact, Whittier was easily the best-known American poet of the last part of the nineteenth century. His verses were very popular and graced the pages of America's finest literary magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Consideration of these two poems shows a more than rough equivalence of sentiment—the poets' unabashed love for their homelands. Neither tries to hide patriotism beneath a veneer of complex technique or studied cynicism. The emotion sometimes overwhelms the verse. Whittier's poem is a bit sing-song, as is Whitney's. The poems are both overtly didactic. And yet one senses that both poems are, after all, appropriate to the circumstances they celebrate. As a recent anthologist said of Whittier, "It is certain that his genuine values will survive the neglect of recent decades. . . . Whittier too often marred a poem by sentimentality, but [his better poems] prove him also the master of simplicity" (Bradley 1508). Whitney's best work exhibits a similar capacity for simplicity unmarred by naive sentimentality. Should Whittier come back into vogue, I suspect that we will better understand John Taylor's choice: "I prefer Whitney to Whittier" (*Halls*, 176). And we will also understand Whitney's rightful pleasure at a prophet's gentle praise.

President Taylor was responding to my third,

and last, choice, which is taken from Book Three of *Elias: An Epic of the Ages*: "Elect of Elohim" (*Voices* 22-25). Because of my perception of its uniqueness, I will not attempt to compare it with another American poem. It is an account of the Council in Heaven. Please note its simple grandeur as the Son answers the Father's call, followed by the stubborn bluntness of Lucifer's rebellion.

In solemn council sat the Gods;
From Kolob's height supreme,
Celestial light blazed forth afar
O'er countless kokaubeam.¹
And faintest tinge, the fiery fringe
Of that resplendent day,
'Lumined the dark abysmal realm
Where Earth in chaos lay.

Silence. That awful hour was one
When thought doth most avail;
Of worlds unborn the destiny
Hung trembling in the scale.
Silence self-spelled, and there arose,
Those kings and priests among,
A Power sublime, than whom appeared
None mightier 'mid the throng.

A stature mingling strength with grace,
Of meek though godlike mien;
The glory of whose countenance
Outshone the noonday sheen.
Whiter his hair than ocean spray,
Or frost of alpine hill.
He spake; —attention grew more grave,
The stillness e'en more still.

"Father!" the voice like music fell,
Clear as the murmuring flow
Of mountain streamlet trickling down
From heights of virgin snow.
"Father," it said, "since One must die,
Thy children to redeem
From worlds all formless now and void,
Where myriad life shall teem;

"And mighty Michael foremost fall
That mortal man may be;
And chosen Savior yet must send,
Lo, here am I—send me!
I ask, I seek no recompense,
Save that which then were mine;
Mine be the willing sacrifice,
The endless glory Thine!

"Give me to lead to this lorn world,
 When wandered from the fold,
 Twelve legions of the noble ones
 That now thy face behold;
 Tried souls, 'mid untried spirits found,
 That captained these may be,
 And crowned the dispensations all
 With powers of Deity.

Who bide unblamed the spirit state
 Shall clothe in mortal clay—
 The stepping-stone to glories all,
 If men will God obey;
 Believing where they cannot see,
 Till they again shall know,
 And answer give, reward receive
 For all deeds done below.

"The Love that hath redeemed all worlds
 All worlds must still redeem;
 But mercy cannot justice rob—
 Or where were Elohim?
 Freedom—man's faith, man's work, God's grace—
 Must span the great gulf o'er;
 Life, death, the guerdon or the doom,
 Rejoice we or deplore."

Still rang that voice, when sudden rose
 Aloft a towering form,
 Proudly erect as lowering peak
 'Lumed by the gathering storm;
 A presence bright and beautiful,
 With eye of flashing fire,
 A lip whose haughty curl bespoke
 A sense of inward ire.

"Send me!"—coiled 'neath his courtly smile
 A scarce-concealed disdain—
 "And none shall hence, from Heaven to Earth,
 That shall not rise again.
 My saving plan exception scorns.
 Man's will?—Nay, mine alone.
 As recompense, I claim the right
 To sit in yonder Throne!"

Speaking of the poem, Whitney said, "'Elias' is a Mormon poem, upon the subject and in the spirit of 'Mormonism'" (*Halls*, 244). His description speaks volumes about purpose and product. "Elect of Elohim" is one of very few Mormon poems to begin to do justice to the dignity and power of the person of our Savior in the context of uniquely Mormon doctrines. It not only presents an account of the

premortal council, but within the story it tells the truth about faith and works and grace. Tomes of theology are less secure (and correct) in their definitions of human agency and divine salvation than these few lines.

When considering this poem, one begins to see the possibility of referring to Whitney's "genius." It is not purely poetic. Whitney himself was often unsure of the technical merit of his work, though he was certain of his vision. Whitney's genius lay in his commitment to Mormonism. He did not want to write just any epic; it had to be an epic that told the truth about the Savior whose agony and love he witnessed so long before in vision. The great plan of happiness was thus crucial to his best work. To evaluate Whitney's poetry only in terms of technique (which is often quite good) is to miss the purpose of his consecration. The poet in Zion shall write for Zion.

Elder Boyd K. Packer, an admirer of Whitney's poems, looks toward his artistic genius in the following statement: "Few have captured the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ—and the restoration of it—in music, in art, in literature. They have not, therefore, even though they were gifted, made a lasting contribution to the onrolling of the Church and kingdom of God in the dispensation of the fulness of times" (qtd. in Sondrup, 4). I believe we Mormons have been mistaken in not paying closer attention to our own literary history. There are few collections of the poetry of the Restoration, and there has been scant recent critical attention paid to individual writers or poems. Contemporary Mormon poets show some signs of familiarity with the Mormon poetic tradition, but they are often more interested in the traditions of Western or American poetry. I suspect that it would be possible to synthesize all those traditions and thereby begin to consecrate wonderful talent to themes and testimonies of the restored gospel.

My goal has been to reintroduce the often delightful and idealistic prose of an important early advocate of Mormon letters and to share some of his poems, which I believe deserve more consideration from the ever-dwindling collection of people who still may share the ideal of consecrated poetry. My hope is that we will find more ways to see that at least some Mormon art ought to have decidedly

Mormon themes. Not all Mormon artists ought all the time to write this way. But the very best Mormon poetry will have to include the spirit of consecration and testimony typical of Orson F. Whitney. It makes little sense for us to believe in an aesthetic that uplifts and edifies independently of the truths of the Restoration.

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NOTE

1. A reference to Abraham 3:13.

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The Example of Virginia Sorensen: Honest Ambivalence and the Mormon Experience

Laurie Illions Rodriguez and Joshua P. Rodriguez

In Karl Keller's article "The Example of Flannery O'Connor," he claims that a good portion of Mormon literature is "jack fiction" (62). According to Keller, most Mormon literature tends towards two extremes: "home" literature, which is "jack-fiction" because it deals with doctrines in a simplistic, didactic manner and is not realistic enough to do the truths justice, and "regional" or "lost-generation" literature, which is "jack-fiction" because it is usually cynical and deals with few gospel doctrines, and even then only incidentally. Neither, as he sees it, is faithful to the principles and truths of the restored gospel; that is to say, neither imaginatively applies nor metaphorically represents those beliefs and mysteries we hold most dear (i.e., the atonement, eternal families, exaltation, etc.). Though Virginia Sorensen's literature does not deal directly with the doctrinal and philosophical topics Keller recommends, her work is not "jack-fiction."

Her honesty does not allow her work to fit into either of the categories he describes. Although Sorensen, like other "lost-generation" writers, is not afraid to ask tough questions and represent unorthodox topics or orthodox topics unorthodoxly, her work is not as cynical as much of the other "lost-generation" works are. In addition, it has a sense of delight mixed with the skepticism typical of lost generation authors. Both her delight and skepticism, although seemingly contradictory, can exist simultaneously because they are each a result of the honesty that can be found throughout her books. Her honesty not only prevents her from being solely cynical, but it also prevents her from being didactic. Rather than believing in manipulating fiction to teach a truth, she believes good fiction to be "one person's honest report on life" (Sorensen, "Is," 285; emphasis ours). It is this honesty that made us want to learn

about Virginia Sorensen. The honesty that we sensed and that we believe she is talking about is not a detail-specific, or historical, honesty, but rather a personal honesty in confronting the complexity of experiences. It is an honesty that allows different, even contradictory, voices to exist simultaneously, interact, and struggle with each other—a process that is ultimately illuminating.

The best way to explain and define this honesty is to describe Kate Alexander, one of Sorensen's main characters in *The Evening and the Morning*, who has this same honest approach to life. Like Sorensen, Kate does not purport to have all the answers for herself, much less for other people. When she notices her granddaughter do something foolish, she does not make the moment didactic: "She made no moral. . . . Morals were never to be made except within, for oneself, where they were accurate enough to be useful" (5). Like Kate, Virginia Sorensen does not choose to prescribe truth for other people. She is neither didactic like the writers of home literature nor as cynical as much of the lost generation, merely honest. She acknowledges both good and bad, the seemingly contradictory.

Like Sorensen's honesty, Kate's honesty allows for complexity and makes her a complex character. A version of Kate's character (Virginia Sorensen's grandmother) and part of the story line from *The Evening and the Morning* also appear in Sorensen's short story "The Apostate," from *Where Nothing is Long Ago: Memories of a Mormon Childhood*. As a marginalized character who jokingly calls herself "a wicked old apostate" (48), Virginia's grandmother does not seem a likely heroine for a Mormon story—especially for one that we're claiming to be above the title of "jack-fiction." For example, in "The Apostate," the grandmother had written a description

of Mormon women: "Every one had those downward lips, the chastened anxious eyes. Cows. Polygamy did it. The Priesthood." She had annotated a book about Buddhism, "Sometimes I wonder whether I am even a good Christian," and had marked a passage that read, "Christians permit matrimony as a concession to weakness, but there is no real understanding of women" (53). Similarly, in *The Evening and the Morning*, Kate enjoys shocking the home teachers, whom she considers well-intentioned but short-sighted. Yet, the grandmother must not have completely rejected religion because she is continually struggling with it rather than dismissing it, and because she refuses to remove her garments on her deathbed even though her daughter asks, "You don't believe in all that, mother! . . . so *why*—" (55-56). This ambivalence is not a flaw but a result of honesty. In *The Evening and the Morning*, Kate says, "The so-called rebels . . . are not really the rebels at all. They're simply the natural ones who refuse to bother to pretend" (29-30). In "The Apostate," the grandmother is struggling, finding her own truths about how to live. She has marked in one of her books:

belief . . . is not in itself an indication of truth. Though we have to act on faith in the quest for truth, faith is not a substitute for evidence. Faith is nothing more than a state of satisfaction with received beliefs . . . nor is the comfort which an idea gives a mark of its truth. . . . (55)

Instead of simply believing, she is constantly searching, allowing the paradoxes to fight within her, honestly acknowledging her own doubts as well as flaws that she sees in the way the religion is implemented.

Like the grandmother's honesty, Virginia Sorensen's honesty allows for a complex understanding of her grandmother. Although the neighbors and home teachers judge and do not understand her in *The Evening and the Morning* and although Sorensen herself, as a child in "The Apostate," does not understand her grandmother's honest struggle and independence, this marginalized woman who calls herself an apostate is a good character. In "The Apostate," we learn about the grandmother from young Virginia's point of view. She was a symbol of help: "In every family crisis she had been there. For years I had felt that from the sunset, which was

California, came rescue. She moved about the rooms and order entered, like sun through a window" (51). She also passed on a sense of appreciation:

Grandmother was one to come home from a walk with her pockets heavy. When she visited us, we had wonderful walks. She knew the names of stones and bugs, and of birds she discovered with her binoculars. She even knew the names of weeds and would come in with an armful of purple asters and joint grass and make a bouquet that looked like nothing I had ever seen. (40)

In addition, Sorensen learns from her grandmother's wisdom. Her grandmother teaches her to stop running around and stop shouting about lost items, "Somebody took my . . ." by saying, "It's in my pocket," even though it obviously wasn't. Finally, little Virginia realizes the folly of accusing a "wicked Somebody" of taking her things (52). These examples show that Sorensen values her grandmother's inherent goodness—her willingness to help, her love, her appreciation of all that is good, and her wisdom. Sorensen's acknowledgment of the grandmother's struggle and marginalization, combined with this appreciation of the good person that she actually is, allows us to appreciate the grandmother not only for her traditional virtues, but also for her other virtues of individuality and honesty.

It is this honesty in Virginia Sorensen's works that creates the multiplicity of voices and the ambivalence that can be seen in the stories "Where Nothing Is Long Ago," "The Ghost," and "The Darling Lady." Like Shakespeare, in his ability to resist eliminating or hiding uncertainties, and like Kate, Sorensen "makes no moral"; that is not her intent. Also, like Kate's honesty, Sorensen's honesty allows many voices to interact, and the resulting sincerity and complexity are instructive. Sorensen's willingness to see, feel, and acknowledge both good and bad, simple and complex, the full range of emotions, experiences, and aspects of experience allows us to see ourselves. Not only does her work not fit Keller's two categories of "jack-fiction" ("home" literature and "regional" literature), but the paradoxes her honesty creates cause us to ask how Mormons believe and live what they believe. Sorensen's honesty in these stories causes us to evaluate our culture, our tendency to marginalize rather than appreciate people, and our tendency to overlook parts of the

truth, thus opening our eyes and helping us to love better. Her work is therefore valuable to the Mormon community and is not "jack-fiction."

These effects of Sorensen's honesty can be seen in the short story "Where Nothing Is Long Ago." Sorensen gives voice to the different perspectives within the community, letting them interact within the story. Some of these voices come to an ironic synthesis within young Virginia, who, as a child, accepts and voices them. When Brother Tolsen kills the water thief (his neighbor) with a shovel, young Virginia's childlike descriptions show that she is aware of the violence of the act. She sees the bloody rabbit ears on the grass of the courtyard after the annual rabbit hunt and innocently feels that they are somehow connected to the killing. She sees the sunset as "huge and red and terribly intense . . ." and describes how "against it I could see my own red blood shining through my skin. . . . Heads were brimful of blood too—I knew that from a nosebleed and from teeth coming out" (9). Because she is a child, she can get away with this morbid speculation that accentuates the violence of the murder and our own human vulnerability. We can be hurt, and thus we can hurt each other. We can bleed or even die, especially if someone chooses violence. The stranger who lives near them is not the only one that can be hurt or killed; Virginia is full of blood too, thus making the violence and the tragedy less distant.

However, at the same time, she has a very romantic view of death, largely reflecting cultural values and beliefs. She says, "It was perfectly reasonable to me to believe that, as I was assured, [the dead] had just stepped 'through the veil between earth and heaven'" (9). She felt that they looked better dressed up in their coffins and pictured them "in their clean new clothes, walking slowly westward with the sun and vanishing in a tremendous scarlet smile of sunset. I had even seen something like that in the movies, so I suspected that the miracle happened not only in Utah but also in California" (10).

This oversimplification, characteristic of a child's voice, accentuates the minimization of the pain of grief and senselessness of some deaths, particularly the thief's. Her assumption that it happened in California because of the movies makes her reductive view seem more naive, thus again accentuating that a truth—the tragic dark side of death—is left out of

the community's simplified model. Of course, the community's model of death is not simplified in all the same ways; they undoubtedly don't think that ascendance to heaven happens mainly in Utah and California. However, we call their model simplified because, though there is truth to the comforting story of the veil and the afterlife, there is also truth to the pain and tragedy of death—especially a murder that happens only because of someone's evil choice and action.

The comforting parts of our religious beliefs have a place only because of the tragic realities. When people repeat the "comforting" part as a platitude without personally or empathetically experiencing and acknowledging the depth of the sorrow and pain, the result is selfish self-preservation from pain—"comforting" those who are mourning, rather than mourning with them. Though life after death is part of the truth, it becomes so unbalanced and inappropriately applied that the implications become untrue.

The unfortunate implications of the community's applying the comforting beliefs to Lena's husband's situation can be seen in the ironic clash between the phrase young Virginia picks up from the community and the violence she senses. She wants to see the funeral of someone who had been "knocked head-long 'through the veil' with a shovel" (10). While "through the veil" has a peaceful image and the connotation of God's will, the words "knocked head-long" and "with a shovel" clash with it, showing the obviously violent nature of the death and that the death is a direct result of a purposeful action. This clash shows that while it may be comforting for someone who is mourning to think about "the veil," it is certainly not appropriate for outsiders to minimize the tragedy by focusing on only this part of the truth. When people who are not part of the hardship hear the faithful, hopeful parts, they mistakenly see them as all there is.

This reaction can also be seen in "The Apostate," where young Virginia, having learned the stories of the hardships of the pioneers, is shocked to find out that the reason her grandmother is so nontraditional is because of her hard life growing up with polygamy, with her father sometimes in hiding and not enough food for her and her family. Virginia thought hardships were supposed to be "welcome, actually an

incentive to more and more faith." She asks, "Weren't the brave pioneers troubled with drought and crickets and floods as well as wild Indians? They had to dig sego lily roots for food. Why didn't grandmother dig sego lily roots?" (49) This tendency to minimize or not understand grief and hardship becomes tragic as soon as a real mourner is involved.

The community minimizes Lena's grief. People feel sorry for her, not because of her widowhood but because she had a husband who had fallen and stolen water. Because Virginia's model of death was happy, she felt sorry for Lena, not so much because her husband died as because she had no hope for the highest place in heaven because he died without the priesthood. She thought:

Poor Lena! I knew that since her husband had fallen away from the faith she could never get much glory in the next world. Even if he had not been a water-thief, he wouldn't have done her much good in heaven. In the Mormon Church, every man can aspire to some sort of ordination—every small boy of any virtue whatever is a Deacon and can go on to be a Priest and an Elder and a Teacher and a High Priest and all sorts of important-sounding things. But a woman has no Priesthood and must depend on her husband to take her to The Highest Degree. I visualized dazzling marble steps stretching up and up to the throne of God Himself, with winged people arranged thereon according to their just deserts. (12)

This image is ironic because the priesthood is not a ladder to heaven, something people should aspire to in order to be important, though obviously someone in her community gave little Virginia that impression. Lena's neighbors hope she will marry a better husband—a "believer" this time, since she is "young yet, after all" (12). By wishing this, they ignore the loss of the husband she had already had—a person that they hadn't taken the time to know or appreciate because he was not one of them.

In actuality, the community has more concern for Tolsen and his family than for Lena and hers. Although the community members have the courtesy to attend the funeral, some of their comments reveal more worry for Brother Tolsen's feelings than for Lena's. They say it will be hard for him to see her but that she surely must realize the murder was an accident. They do not even acknowledge how hard

it will be for her to see her husband's killer or to live without her husband. Furthermore, Brother Tolsen is released from jail before the trial because it is understood that his family needs him. This causes the reader to ask about Lena's family. Doesn't she need her husband? Does she have children? We do not ever get to know the victim—not even his name—because the characters themselves do not know him, probably "because . . . he had fallen away" as Virginia's grandmother had said (9).

However, young Virginia sees Brother Tolsen's sin. She admits, "Losing the faith, I knew, was one of the greatest of sins, but murder was worse; it was the greatest sin of them all" (9). She admits this despite the fact that Brother Tolsen is important at church and speaks often, bearing his testimony and preaching at funerals with the same delightful Danish accent that Bishop Peterson speaks with. For her, all that is Danish and Mormon is associated with all that is "virtuous, kind and of good report" (7). Her delighted tie between the two Danish Mormon men accentuates her positive associations with Brother Tolsen and is silhouetted by the darker prejudice of the community that is reluctant to accept that this "gentle man" had done anything very bad.

When young Virginia wonders if Brother Tolsen got a new shovel, her mother says, "Don't you ever let me hear you say a thing like that again! . . . Brother Tolsen is a good, kind man!" (14) Furthermore, at the funeral Brother Tolsen is dignified, shaking hands with "the Brethren" while Lena is crumpled over in grief.

Virginia Sorensen remembers feeling sorry for Lena and not for Brother Tolsen, not because Lena deserves pity and Brother Tolsen deserves justice, but because Lena is a pitiful sight and Brother Tolsen looks dignified. The community's failure to truly apprehend the tragedy of the loss of a black sheep's life and sin in a prominent "good" man's life, continues at the trial. The "trial" seems rather one-sided: character witnesses praise Brother Tolsen, Brother Tolsen tells his own version of the killing, and his lawyer equates stealing water with the act of killing itself, thereby suggesting that Brother Tolsen's crime was an act of self-defense. Apparently Lena's husband has no character witnesses or witnesses of his murder. In fact, the jury could tell that Tolsen's "friends and neighbors considered him innocent of

any real wrong doing" (13) and soon agreed with them. The community's reaction is an example of maximizing evil in a man they already had decided was evil and minimizing it in a man they had already decided was good.

Virginia Sorensen doesn't moralize; she just describes the scene and lets the many voices interact. These voices include a little girl's romantic view of death that is in part a simplified version of what she has been told by the community, young Virginia's sense of the violence, young Virginia's knowledge that killing is worse than "falling away," Lena's grief and the tragedy that shows through, the various community members' reactions to the death, and the irony created when these and other perspectives combine. From the combination of different voices, we see the community's prejudice against the man who had "fallen away" and prejudice in favor of the "worthy" murderer. We must ask ourselves what *worthy* means to us—do we let it become just a privileged position? And we must ask how truly charitable we can be without acknowledging loss.

Like "Where Nothing Is Long Ago," which raises questions about our acceptance and treatment of marginalized figures in Mormon culture, "The Ghost" raises questions about our willingness to love *all* of our neighbors as ourselves and actively challenges the community's reluctance with Virginia's independent delight. In this story, young Virginia, innocent and free of cultural labels and proscriptions, "discovers" for herself the black man on the train in spite of the societal forces marginalizing black people and creating distance between her and them. In this story, Virginia is very much like Marly, the curious girl protagonist in *Miracles on Maple Hill*. Both are inquisitive, delighted, and eager to have an adventure, but also a little scared to go alone. At the same time, the community in which Virginia participates is like Marly's older brother, Joe, who always supposedly knows more, and is both an admired hero and at times the antagonist (sometimes simultaneously).

The full comparison between Virginia and Marly can be seen only in the context of the "miracles" that take place on Maple Hill. The "miracles" are really just all the things that are wonderful and fascinating to Marly. The possibility for so many "miracles" is sparked by the decision of Marly's parents to move out to the old family cabin, rich with memories and

located in a fresh wilderness setting. For Marly, the discoveries of living in the woods and reliving her mother's experiences when she had been Marly's age are limitless. Yet contrasting with her delight and discovery is always the skeptical, know-it-all attitude of her brother.

One of the first "miracles" (and grounds for clashing perspectives) takes place in the midst of this new fascination, when Marly opens her dresser (the one her mother had used when she was a girl) and finds a family of mice, with pink, beautiful babies. Marly is completely enraptured while her family is thoroughly disgusted. To Marly's dismay, her father orders Joe to set a trap for the mother mouse and to dispose of the babies. In spite of her tears, Marly cannot make anyone else see the intrinsic fascination in the mice.

"The Ghost" portrays a very similar sense of delight and discovery clashing with a distanced attitude of disdain. This story sets up the tone of fascination, recounting Virginia's first encounter with a black man. On a train ride to Denver, Virginia innocently crosses lines of social stigma as she "discovers" and admires the black man's sparkling eyes and teeth, his long, slender fingers, and pink palms. He is a miracle that she holds dear without interference from outside cultural constructs. Her experience is sovereign and intimately her own; from her honest innocence, she delights in the wonders of her world.

The wonder of this discovery is then immediately brought up again within the context of the Mormon community where the circumstances of Virginia's encounter with a black man at church is like Marly's with the mouse family in the top drawer at the cabin on Maple Hill. Each girl is challenged by opposing, rejecting attitudes. This time, instead of being a solitary and sovereign experience, the social forces of the community clearly affect Virginia. Like Marly, who falls in love with the mice, Virginia is enchanted by the presence of the black man at church, remembering the other black man on the train, noticing his eyes and teeth flashing in contrast to his beautiful dark skin. Yet in contrast to her delight, the community's disdain is almost immediately evident, given voice through Virginia's innocent friend Carol, the bishop's daughter.

The ensuing conversation between Virginia and Carol reflects the sentiments expressed by Marly and

Joe the night they go to see Mr. Chris, their new neighbor, as he boils sap into syrup at the sugar house. As the pots of bubbling sap reach the boiling point and are about to overflow, Mr. Chris takes a stick dipped in lard and, waving it like a white magic wand over the boiling pots, makes the bubbles subside. Marly is awestruck, while Joe smugly comments on the scientific reasons for the phenomenon that he had learned in an encyclopedia. Similarly, while Virginia basks in awe of the black man, Carol smugly explicates the cultural views about blacks, including some supposedly "doctrinal" reasons for viewing them as inferior. Though without malicious intent, Carol innocently imposes the culture's racial stigma. The black man is off limits now, though to Virginia his magic remains.

The contrast between the two perspectives seen in the conversation between Virginia and Carol makes it clear that Virginia's impulse to see, know, and meet the black man is backed by nothing more than the sovereign reality of her delight, while the community's rejection of him stems from prejudice, fear, and stigma, though it ironically finds refuge in "doctrine," official or otherwise. That is, in contrast to Virginia the well-meaning Latter-day Saints seem to give their racial apprehensions credibility in the priesthood prohibition that is believed to stem from the "curse" (123-24). In this light, the "justice" of God makes blacks different, distanced, inferior, and dark, not just in color. Yet it is apparent that this stigma does not just grow out of belief in the "curse" and the priesthood prohibition but rather, that in the logic of the "curse" the community members can hide their prejudice from themselves. This is evident because, even outside of a religious context, their prejudice is still very apparent. Sorensen makes it clear that the community distrusts the black man. Virginia recalls "how careful people were about letting their children go on hikes" after the black man's family moved into the canyon (125). Virginia's desire to see the black man and his family strongly contrasts with and hence underscores her social distance from him and the community's willful withdrawal from him.

In the description of the conversation between Virginia and Carol, Sorensen is able to honestly portray the dialogue between unassuming delight and racial prejudice without negating her attachment to

Mormonism and falling into the trap of cynical "jack-fiction." At the level of the community, albeit a Mormon community, the tension between delight and prejudice does not necessarily bring the Church into question. That is, Mormons are shown just as people, without grappling with the religious implications of restored truth or saintliness. However, Sorensen does bring into question the role that members and local leaders of the Church play in perpetuating prejudice (intentionally or unintentionally) and hence shows them working against their own ideals. Though Sorensen includes an episode with the bishop as a mouthpiece for the ward and for the small Mormon community, she avoids any type of indictment against the Church itself, as such. She does this by not portraying the bishop as an idealized or prophetic leader but by frankly (though not maliciously) describing him as she would anyone else: with shortcomings, misunderstandings, and all. The imperfections she lets show through, then, are personal errors, not "official" ones.

So when Virginia and Carol go to the bishop to find out why blacks don't have the priesthood, he merely replies, "Who are we to question God and the prophet?" (124) This type of response clashes with Virginia's childlike audacity in inquiring about the value of something she has discovered independently—in this case, blacks. But more than becoming an issue of doctrine, the bishop's response merely gives voice to the community's lack of understanding that is disguised by their "doctrinal" justifications and yet continues to actively perpetuate racism. Because this issue is not pursued at an official level but is kept as a description of the members' explanations of black inferiority and their reactions to the black family, Sorensen avoids commenting on any official doctrine. So by carefully and sincerely portraying her observations, Sorensen is able to honestly challenge what and how we believe and interpret our religion. Her bold honesty clearly asks us if we put the love of "doctrine" over the love for others, or love for the "Church" over love for "Saints," black or white, members or not.

This unnecessary dichotomy between "doctrine" and acceptance becomes the root of young Virginia's hesitation and ambivalence in meeting the black man at church because he is the focus of both fascination and social stigma. At the same time, her descriptions

of the "Mormon" voice she grew up with become ambivalent because that voice is itself a dynamic of voices that include both true gospel knowledge and prejudices, tucked away in traditional (though not official) gospel explanations, all rolled into one.

Further developing this ambivalence in the socio-ideological clash, young Virginia innocently equates the black man, the untouchable margin of the Mormon community, with Brother Johnson, who resides in the very heart of Mormondom. In drawing a parallel between these two men, the child protagonist unknowingly bridges the gap created by the culture separating the two races. She notes that both have wide mouths, bright teeth, wonderful voices, and dark skin (122). The similarity is simple, and her delight is uniform and honest. This innocent similarity again sets the stage for an ironic clash.

In contrast to Virginia's innocent equation of the two men, no one else sees the strong resemblance between the marginalized Negro and the privileged Dane. The community's refusal to see similarities between blacks and whites depicts the contrived distance between the two as natural, though ironic to Virginia Sorensen. This irony is best expressed in the story's tone and finally in the community's reaction to the Ghost at the dance. Believing the Ghost to be the black man, the leaders quickly and decisively end the costume contest. But when they discover it is "good Brother Johnson," they are relieved (128). Within the context of the ironic and contrived distance between the two races, Sorensen's honesty makes us ask, if they are so essentially similar, as the child's perspective suggests, why does it matter if it was the black man or not? What evil have the young girls been spared? These questions to some degree provoke doubt about this Mormon community's sincere love, good will, and heartfelt understanding of all people, as mandated by Christian principles. Though the irony may seem a bit humorous, it is also sobering because, as adherents to a gospel of goodness (Moro. 7:16-19), we are compelled to see that we often fail to recognize and cherish true goodness when it lies at the fringes of Mormon culture. We are poignantly left to see and ask why we give in to our tendencies to marginalize.

The scriptures teach that men must become like children or they cannot inherit the kingdom of God (3 Ne. 11:37-38). This familiar admonition takes on

a concrete perspective in "The Ghost" because only the child, Virginia, is able to see the wonder in the black men, to delight in them, and to naturally perceive human equality where the societal forces (even in a community of "Saints") try to interfere. Her childlike independence from societal forces keeps her innocent.

Though on one hand cultural constructs are brought into question, the tone of the story is gentle, more anecdotal than satirical. The affection of childhood memories maintains the delicate balance of critique and delight, still openly showing the conflicting voices that have left impressions on young Virginia. Perhaps not understanding at the time what those particular social exchanges implied, with mature insight Sorensen now recreates the innocent encounter with black people with penetrating wisdom, keeping alive the delight as well as the conflict.

Just as "The Ghost" portrays the conflicts raised by trying to love and appreciate, "The Darling Lady" deals with young Virginia's experiences learning to love her family and the Darling Lady. While in "The Ghost" the issue of love is played out on a community level between social groups, the issue of love in "The Darling Lady" is more personal, making reference to the community only as it influences the experience of individuals.

Initially the story seems to be just about the experience of children who are learning to love, with the main tension created by childish insensitivity. At the beginning, Sorensen describes her and her sister's childish cruelty in imitating and making fun of others, though she mentions that they were never malicious. She and her sister are delightful, though still foolish about love and relationships. They don't yet understand sadness, tragedy, or loss—much less as experienced by others. Their world is still a world of cool water on hot Sunday afternoons, games of finding peanuts hidden by their father, and listening to a band play in the park (20-21).

Though Virginia as narrator is so young that she hasn't yet learned to read, she hears the adults talk and learns by her own experience to feel love and, later, sorrow. Not yet aware of her mother's pregnancy (or that there is even such a thing as pregnancy), Virginia already begins to see her mother as "the most beautiful creature in the world" (19). At the same time she begins to notice her father's kindness

and affection for her mother. It is as if the dream of childhood were complete, without worry or even an understanding of pain or sorrow, just the bud of awareness of how beautifully full her life is.

Though the initial plot seems to focus just on the experience of a little girl, at another level this childish unawareness becomes an ironic commentary on the deliberate "bliss" of the members of the community, who have chosen to ignore the injustices done to abandoned plural wives at the time of the Manifesto. In blatant contrast to the childhood bliss, Sorensen's honesty lets scenes of incongruity, even cruelty, slip through to the reader. In contrast to her childhood haven of family love, the narrator recalls episodes of isolation and envy retold by neighbors about abandoned plural wives. The flippant tone describing Sister Carter, who on "the day the first wife died, rolled her clothes in a bundle and moved in before the corpse was even moved out" (22), is sharply incongruent with the newly found love so innocently taking root in little Virginia. And yet it is in this context of distanced flippancy (perhaps distanced from the pain and disgrace of abandonment) that we, like Virginia, learn of the Darling Lady's terrible fate. Unlike Sister Carter, the Darling Lady never achieved "First Wifeship," and so "miss[ed] out on all the advantages" (22) of marriage. In contrast to Virginia's pregnant mother, the Darling Lady lost her baby when she was foolishly made to ride through the canyon in a wagon while she was pregnant. And unlike the haven of family that surrounds little Virginia, the Darling Lady has no family nearby. She lives alone, tucked away in the back of a dilapidated corner store. Here again, as in "The Ghost," an honest look at the attitudes of members of the Church and the real effect these attitudes have on individuals creates an uncomfortable tension, though, as before, the tension is not aimed cynically at the Church. Rather, this tension serves as a fulcrum for little Virginia's lessons about love, though these "lessons" are far from being didactic.

The wisdom and honesty in the love that Sorensen ultimately describes reaches its profundity as it unhesitatingly explores the pains and losses suffered by abandoned plural wives, made credible and pertinent through the experience of individuals, particularly the Darling Lady herself. When Virginia

and her sister come to realize not only the pains and sorrows of the Darling Lady, but also that she was just a person like anyone, and finally that this lonely old woman called only Virginia and her sister "darlings," she becomes a heroine to them (28). Through the young protagonist's experience with the Darling Lady, Virginia discovers sadness and loneliness as well as sweetness and caring; and in Virginia's memory, the Darling Lady comes to symbolize all these things. So after the Darling Lady's death, the girls often pretend that she comes again as she did the night of the baby's birth—but that this time they invite her in, into their house as well as their hearts. They wish now that they could, and yet it was their experience with her, their initial indifference toward her, her death, and all they learned about her as an abandoned wife, that taught them what love was. Virginia's sense of love that was once bliss and only a budding awareness of all that was right in her family has now blossomed into an awareness that penetrates into the sorrows and regrets of life.

As the crowning representation of this new awareness, the girls pretend that the Darling Lady sits by the fire with them and says, "Well, Darlings, this *is* nice" (28). This final "nice" is now a penetrating "nice," rich with sincere love mingled with, and healing, the pain. Paradoxically, though not surprisingly, the girls learn about love and about how to appreciate the Darling Lady only through the process of losing her and then coming to understand their loss. And it is the voice of this loss, pain, and appreciation that speaks so clearly in contrast to the community's indifference and even denial of the losses suffered so deeply by so many.

In light of Virginia's new understanding of love, contrasted with the community's indifference, the plight of the abandoned wives is not only ironic but tragic. How could her religion, which was so delightful to her, produce something so tragic? Though at such a young age Virginia Sorensen could not have understood the full impact that the mass abandonment at the time of the Manifesto had on those women, her inclusion of such a starkly contrasting description of those women's situation to her childhood bliss makes evident the incongruity she sees. Based on this incongruity, Virginia Sorensen and we, as readers, must struggle to reconcile this betrayal of love within the context of a gospel of love. And

perhaps, at a more personal level, we must evaluate how perceptive we are of the losses suffered by others, particularly those at the fringes of our community, and how sensitive we are to those losses. Sorensen's frankness provokes us to ask what it truly means to implement a gospel of love in our personal lives.

Sorensen's honesty awakens us to possible blind spots, making us more aware of many values central to the gospel: not judging others, appreciating, accepting different parts of the truth, and acknowledging loss—in other words, loving better. Ironically, Virginia Sorensen's grandmother, the "apostate," is an example of these principles. Her values can be seen in Virginia Sorensen's choice of scriptures for her grandmother's funeral. Young Virginia's mother asked Virginia to choose, saying, "You decide—you know what she loved—" (56). Sorensen describes leafing through her grandmother's scriptures:

It was easy to find in her Bible the passages she had loved the most. "Judge not and ye shall not be judged . . . forgive and ye shall be forgiven . . . bless them that curse you . . . for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust . . . when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . . But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret. . . ." (56-57)

Most of these scriptures are scriptures about love. They remind us that God is watching over all of us and that we can be true disciples only if we are blessing others, appreciating them, and accepting the experiences and truths they have to offer rather than judging or marginalizing them. The scripture "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the wicked, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust" (56), acknowledges pain and loss as well as joy; it recognizes that bad and good happen to everyone. Young Virginia also chose a scripture about pomegranates because her grandmother delighted in them, describing them as a "cup of pearls" and later when they are ripe as "shin[ing] like rubies" (39). "Perhaps some thought it strange," wrote Virginia, "that there should be at the very end, 'Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the

tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth.' . . ." (56-57).

The pomegranate scripture shows an honest appreciation, an appreciation that is at once a full charity and a sense of awe for uniqueness wherever it may be found. These are the same truths that are exemplified in Virginia Sorensen's book of short stories *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* and others. Thus, her work is not "jack-fiction"; her honesty is refreshing and uplifting. The questions it poses cause each of us to ask ourselves if we are jack-Mormons—not in the common sense of the word, a marginalized Mormon, but in the true sense of the word, lacking in true discipleship. In other words, we must ask ourselves how truly we love.

Virginia Sorensen's awareness of the ultimate importance of love is perhaps best summed up in the epigraph she chooses for her novel *The Neighbors*. She quotes Romans 13:9-11:

. . . if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for *now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*. (Emphasis ours.)

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Imagining Mormon Marriage, Part I: The Mythic, the Novelistic, and Jack Weyland's Charly

B. W. Jorgensen

The general origin of this essay, or of its overweening ambition, is a sentence of the American feminist critic Carolyn Heilbrun: "The truth is," she wrote, "that marriage is difficult to imagine . . ." (91). The more immediate occasion of this segment of a huge fragment of a sprawling essay-in-progress is Tessa Meyer Santiago's call for papers for this session. Tessa, whom I remember earliest as a nineteen-year-old writing tropically lush circles around everyone else in an Honors section of an advanced writing class, writes now that "hav[ing] completed the rites of passage . . . mission, endowments, graduation from BYU, marriage, children etc.," she "must endure—to the end," and finds that

. . . there is not much written to guide or comfort me. Orson Scott Card in his Foreword to *Turning Hearts* accuses most American fiction of glorifying the incapacity to make commitments. I find myself needing fiction to help me keep mine. . . . I am irrevocably tied to my commitments—theologically, legally, biologically, morally. I cannot ride off and leave them, in quest of self. I must negotiate my middle-aged Mormonism amidst the responsibilities of adulthood, not the fantasies of adolescence. ("Call," 1)

At nearly the same moment, in a paper entitled "Towards the Promised Land: Latter-day Saint Types and Tropes," invoking Mircea Eliade's sense of myth as "suppl[ying] models for human behavior" through "narrat[ion of] sacred history," Tessa asked, "To which myth do I return for wisdom?" (1). And she answered, at least for the purposes of that paper, with "the pioneer narrative/myth as a guide for the Mormon perplexed" (1); the story of the Mormon pioneers trekking to Deseret and then once again, sometimes several times over, trekking out to colonize the Wasatch Front and the sometimes desert valleys of Southern Utah and beyond.

It's hard, especially as a Mormon who has also undergone most of the rites of passage she lists, not

to resonate to Tessa's Mormon "cry for myth."¹ 'Tis myth that brought us safe thus far: more myth will lead us home? The day I heard Tessa give that paper, I suggested to her that a recourse to myth might be "regressive," that perhaps what we needed was not mythic but novelistic. I had in mind other passages from Eliade, especially in *The Myth of the Eternal Return; or Cosmos and History*, in which he sharply contrasts the attitudes toward time of archaic man and modern man: "The man of a traditional culture sees himself as real only to the extent that he ceases to be himself (for a modern observer) and is satisfied with repeating the gestures of another" (34); in myth and ritual "there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'" (35), which "the man of archaic culture tolerates . . . with difficulty and attempts periodically to abolish" (36) through a "transfiguration of history into myth" (37); thus "archaic humanity . . . defended itself, to the utmost of its powers, against all the novelty and irreversibility which history entails" (48). As participants in Mormon priesthood ordinances, especially those of the temple, all active Latter-day Saints reenact types and tropes of ancient date; we are, at least within temple walls, peculiar atavistic survivals of "archaic humanity." Yet most days of the week, Sundays included, we are also modern and "historical" or "historicist" persons; we put a high premium on our individuality, our singular moral agency, and on the mortal and even "profane" time in which we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, in what Eliade calls over and over "the terror of history" (ch. 4). I and you are both archaic and modern, alas.

And recognizing that, I share both Tessa's wish for "fiction" that includes a "model . . . that deals more realistically with the moral commitments Mormon women [and men, I will add] make to community, spouse, children, vocation, God, etc.," and her wish for "A Myth for Mormon Middle Age," about which she wonders, "are there legends,

mythic heroes, or does the nature of the stage mean we cannot have heroes. No more windmills to tilt at. What are the signposts, the markers? Any rites of passage?" ("Call," 2). Eliade, it seems to me, acknowledges a powerful nostalgia for the mythic consciousness of archaic culture, yet is resolutely committed to his own historicized consciousness, the burden of what we Mormons might call individual moral agency, which lives in historical not mythic time, and seeks to make its own history, not to dissolve into the generic pattern of myth, while all the time undergoing ritual regenerations of time and commitment.

What, so far, has Mormon fiction given us by way of signposts and markers past the rites of passage and into or even through Mormon middle age, especially marriage: have we yet imagined Mormon marriage?

Jack Weyland's *Charly* is a ninety-eight-page "novel" about Getting Married—but only having to endure that marriage till the young wife's pathetically early death: till death do us part. Why start here at all? Well, for one thing, *Charly's* durable sales² make this skinny book hard to ignore, even if, on the face of it, the message seems to be: The best wife is the dead one; or, The happy marriage is the lost one, short and sweet. As the only paradise is paradise lost, Getting Married in *Charly* seems at first mainly a matter of Fun: finding the girl who, in Sam's case, will provoke him to Fun, then adjusting the Fun Quotient (FQ) of the prospective partners. (You could wonder if all those fun "creative" dates and marriage proposals were inspired by this novel, or at least this kind of cotton candy fiction.) I don't see any hint of sexual passion at all in Sam or Charly. But okay, forgo that. I don't see much that I call love either. I see what Aristotle might call a friendship based on pleasure (=Fun here);³ no eros in the wide and deep Greek sense of the word, the passionate love that seeks and enjoys the whole presence of the beloved;⁴ no sign of any emotional or carnal tenderness, both of which marriage requires in large measures. The scarier part is, there's no friendship of virtue either, to speak of. Sure, Sam and Charly are as squeaky-clean abstinent as anyone might want LDS kids to be. They're Barbie & Ken—Barbie without boobs; and lacking genitalia, it's no surprise they haven't the first thought of . . . in this context,

one can't even utter a euphemism. I'm being too hard on this book. Patience, then, and a closer look.

After testing Sam in a bunch of "practical" ways, with her NYC boyfriend Mark mostly winning on points, sometimes by cheating, Charly decides to marry Sam because she "prayed about it" (46). Nice. Bingo. After some tears, Charly's mother consents—what else, since Sam would never compromise—to the temple wedding she will not witness. So then in Chapter 7, dead center in the little book (pp. 48-52 of 98), they get married in one sentence, have their reception in another sentence, have ice cream with *their* "parents at her home" in a third, say goodbye to *her* parents in about sixteen lines, and drive off, with Sam "feel[ing] like the wicked ogre tearing the fair young maiden from her parents and home" (51-52).

Not to worry, though: there's hardly any ogre about Sam at all in the wedding night scene. After guiltily checking into the Hotel Utah, "as Charly prepared herself in the bathroom," Sam "nervously tried to find all the pins the factory had hidden in [his "newly purchased"] pajamas, [and] recalled [his] mission president explaining his feelings about being on a mission: 'There's no place in the world I'd rather be than where I am right now.' Except for my nervousness, and my fear of having one pin in the pajamas, that was the way I felt at that moment" (52). And that's all, folks; that's it: the way old ogre Sam felt. (Sometimes in weak minimalism, what's on the page is all there is.) Even the next moment: "When she came out, she looked so beautiful in her long, white, flowing, modest negligee" (52). She's "so [generically] beautiful" (remember she looks "like a model for a diet soft drink" [3]), that the only sign of passion in Sam might be that slightly breathless comma series; but "modest" reassures us that no one is panting in anticipation or fear of anything (unless it's pins). So when "'Well,' she sa[ys] quietly, 'here we are,'" and sits "on the bed beside" Sam, he "nervously cleared [his] throat." Charly, bless her, tries again: "Hello, husband dear," she said with a slight smile." What can he do? At least he can use the pronoun we: "'Before we begin,' I said, borrowing an old missionary line, 'we'd like to have a word of prayer.'" That's the patriarchal *we*, as the second instance makes clear, the senior companion *we*, the *we* of the priesthood leader, the man in charge.

Lightly, let us say, even tenderly, in this delicate light-comic moment written, we must bear in mind, for young minds and edited by folks habitually dedicated to insuring that those minds shall not encounter the least hint of ogreish sensuality. Allow all that; allow that it is honorable and well-intentioned. The next voice you hear will be that of the patriarchal family chronicler, your narrator: "We did, too, a kneeling prayer—our first family prayer" (52). End of scene, end of wedding night, end of chapter; Chapter 8 begins, "That fall we moved to Provo so I could finish my last semester of school" (53): *we* moved so *I* could; and we move on to other topics, the topics of Being Married and Staying Married, one might propose.

But did you notice there was not a single body part or passion in that passage? Other than a nervously cleared throat? There was a slight smile that must have had a face to wear it, lips with teeth and tongue behind, a skull beneath the implicit skin; there was kneeling so there must have been knees, and if knees, then thighs, then the wondrous ball-and-socket apparatus of human pelvic architecture. Were there hands to clasp in prayer, hands that might then begin to begin? The text will not tell. There were new (and, we hope, pinless) pajamas and a negligee, bless them. Perhaps it's really all right to imagine marriage without bodies; perhaps that is the only "moral" way a Mormon writer should or may do it. At least if he writes to be read by young people, who, goodness knows, are bothered enough by their bodies, and know and guess fearful things about the risks of flesh. Perhaps it's okay for Sam and Charly to "begin" marriage with witty and, yes, even reverent and tender one-liners in a novel after all of one-liners. Okay, okay. Say I've just taken an elephant gun to a mosquito; I'll say that text is text and may be read closely, and I've just done laser surgery on Barbie and found vinyl all the way through. Not viable. So no wonder Charly dies and Sam's earthly marriage dies with her, dies to become the really perfect celestial mate who'll wait in eternity for sad Sam.

But I've just been false to Chapter 7, for wedding and wedding night are only the very last page of it—well, page and an eighth. The first four and a fourth pages here are the weightier matter: "ten days before the wedding date" Sam and Charly had their

interviews with the bishop and stake president, and on their way home that night with temple recommends in their hands, Charly confessed to Sam that "before [she] joined the Church, or even knew anything about it, there were some problems in my life, problems that would've prevented me from getting a temple recommend if I'd been a member of the Church," and now, this far along in their relationship (and not untypically, let us grant that), "I thought I should tell you" (48). When she does answer his "What kind of problems?" with nervously pursed lips, "Problems of moral cleanliness," Sam "felt sick" and "couldn't let it alone": "Do you remember all their names?" I asked, tortured by my imagination." Charly starts to cry, and asks, "Doesn't it make any difference to you that since I've been baptized I've kept the commandments?" A right-on question, of course. But Sam says, "I don't want used merchandise" (49). It will be harder for most readers to forgive him that than for Charly to—we never get to see her do that—though he sees that he "could just as well have struck her in the face—it would have hurt her less" (49).

Here we are up against something grave. Making a marriage is a moment in the histories of people who have histories. You marry her with her history, she marries you with yours, you two try to make a new history, a two-as-one history, out of that. It's here that we can be pretty sure Weyland knows Sam is as much a jerk as any Mormon man, as much deserving of both blame and pardon for being a jerk.⁵ We haven't a clue, and neither does Sam, whether Charly had intercourse or petted heavily or had oral sex or what, but Sam, since she was a Gentile, presumes the worst. There's no escape via summary in this little scene: apparently what she said, "Problems of moral cleanliness," is all she said. In any case, to Sam she's "used merchandise," and the noun is more substantively insulting than the past participle. He's decided she's not a virgin, and that's enough for him. The least and most we can suppose is that she's had some reportable sexual experience. It's the first acknowledgment of a sexual body in their relationship, and alas that it enters the story in this negative mode, as past transgression that Sam can't stomach now.

He leaves her at her door, postponing a cancellation of the wedding—"No . . . not yet" (49)—and

drives straight to the bishop to say he "can't marry her" because "She's not clean in my eyes and never will be," "not pure in the way I want my wife to be . . . not worthy" (49). I daresay this is the most dramatic scene in the book, the most charged with religious and moral tension and passion. At last we're onto something, and for a page or so we're really on it. Ascertaining that Sam "really feel[s] that way," the bishop takes his recommend back and "put[s] it in his desk drawer." Sam complains, "She's the one, not me," but the bishop is adamant. You could say he has Sam by the ecclesiastical short hairs, but even more, he has him by his theological throat: "You don't believe in the atonement of the Savior!"—this to an RM who preached Christ for two years and baptized this young woman. "Until you do—until you can accept that people can make mistakes and repent and receive forgiveness—you'll never get a temple recommend from me."

It's Sam's Pharisaic righteousness the bishop will not abide: "I could understand if you said you couldn't marry her because you personally couldn't deal with her past, but I won't let you tell me she's not worthy, because that simply isn't true." Or you could say the issue here is a male authority struggle, this bishop's word, "worthy," against Sam's word, "not worthy." And to be sure, at least thus far, the bishop's is the most unquestioned voice in this book—an interesting thing to notice in a "Mormon novel." Any reader, perhaps even a non-Mormon with sufficient grasp of our ecclesiology and moral theology, will stand with the bishop against Sam here: the official church is more forgiving, more Christlike, than this lover and husband-to-be or not-to-be, this priesthood holder who has yet to grasp the quality of mercy.

It's a tough moment for the whole novel, especially if we take it, so far, as a novel about Getting Married: how can righteous, pure-minded Sam marry "not worthy" Charly, and how can once-unclean Charly give herself to him to be received as "used merchandise"? It takes a page and a half to solve this, dear reader, will you believe it? and it gets resolved, clinched, in a couple of one-liners. But that's too fast for me to move here.

Note also the enormous blank, in this chapter or anywhere in the story, regarding Sam's "moral cleanliness": he has apparently no past-and-forgiven

lapses of a similar nature to report to Charly, has never petted, masturbated, nothing. Good Sam. And if you don't believe it, dear reader, that's because you yourself . . . well, certainly I myself. But let's allow Sam that: he's never been morally unclean, not a whit; all these commandments he has kept from his youth, so what lacks he yet? His bishop has him pegged: "I say that she's more worthy than you are. Don't you call unclean what the Lord has pronounced clean!" And with that, he closed his office door" (50).⁶

Pharisaic pride which rejects the "unclean" is the besetting problem of the good and clean and worthy; and "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). (How one might wish that "message" in this book had lodged itself in the hearts of a generation of young readers.) Well, Sam "stormed to the stake president's house and demanded that he release the bishop"; and after Sam told him why, "he replied that he would have done the same thing and that I was the one in need of repentance" (50). So there, Sam, you righteous jerk. To his credit, Sam spends "hours driving and thinking" and at last prays, arguing Charly's case to himself and finally wondering, "What if I were forever haunted by bitter fantasies about her past? How could I ever forget that I, if we did get married, wasn't the first?" (50). First what, Sam? All that is still undefined and, indeed, exists only as Sam's (for us, unspecified) fantasy.

It's the classic problem for the patriarchal male whose bride must be ironclad guaranteed brand-new unused "merchandise." Whether they mean to or not, even (perhaps especially) popular writers willy-nilly take up the deepest problems of their culture.⁷ Here's how Sam and his author deal with this one. About two a.m. Sam finally parks his jeep, prays "for help," and sits and thinks, first about "What if" he'd not had the Church, or "Sunday School or seminary or Mutual or firesides or bishop's interviews? What mistakes would I have made? All of them, I realized." Sam "would have," he allows, but apparently he has not; he's as squeaky-clean as a brand-new Ken, is good Sam. (Some Sams, as we know, make all the mistakes even with all those props. And then they repent or don't.) Now Sam "reflect[s] back on the

day Charly came out of the waters of baptism—the glow that filled her face,” and all “the changes [he] had seen in her as she learned about church standards,” “changes in every aspect of her life. . . . Day by day, she had become a new person, inside and out” (50). Little or nothing in the little novel has shown us this, and the smoothworn general phrases here, constructing a “typical,” generic, or almost “official” figure of “conversion,” signal a failure to imagine the experience.⁸ But okay, grant it: both characters are barely there. And for barely-there Sam (who after all was the instrument of Charly’s conversion, the hands and voice in her baptism) this is enough, as in the lesson he and we must learn, it should be: “That was it! She had become a new person!” (50).

Now Sam’s “fear and misgivings” leave him, and he wants “to be with her and apologize and let her know that I loved her and wasn’t troubled anymore”; so he drives to her house about 3:30 a.m. and throws pebbles at her window and finally larger ones until “the sixth rock shattered her window, making a terrific crash”—we catch the key change here to light comedy again—and lights go on, Charly’s father shouts to his wife to call the cops and calls out to Sam, “What’s going on out there?” and Sam audaciously calls back “Good morning, Father,” I sweetly answered,” as his way of announcing to all his renewed intention, and we close with a set-up one-liner: Charly says, “It’s almost morning, isn’t it? Do you want some breakfast?” and he says, “Sure, let’s have an almost-breakfast, shall we?” All’s (sit-com) well. No clichés in this scene? But really, let’s remind ourselves that a couple who can play with one another, play to one another, construct comedy, may have a good chance of coupling solidly.

Even if—and surely we must allow this too—even if, in terribly many actual Mormon marriages, “bitter fantasies about [the] past” are not so easily forgotten as these characters and this novel forget them. That is, I think, one of the main weaknesses of *Charly*: like a sitcom, it forgets this week what happened last week, and will next week forget what’s happening right now.⁹ Ten days or nights later, wedding night, Sam and Charly seem mercifully to have forgotten that she is apparently more sexually experienced than he, that this night and Sam are not her “first.” Reader, do you believe it? One need not be a Phari-

see to be troubled by this, though it helps, and Sam is. When—and how—did he apologize to her, or let her apologize to him? In what gestures did they pass this rite of passage?

What more do we learn about the marriage of Sam and Charly? The good news, which Charly tells to the Relief Society in South Dakota, well into her pregnancy, is, when “asked . . . to share some of the things we do with our husbands that bring us closer,” Charly “raised [her] hand and told them, ‘My husband and I like to make love.’ Poor Sister Pearson, she dropped her chalk” (67). Lucky Sam, lucky Charly; we know, alas, that not every Mormon married pair feel that way, though it is a good way to feel. Apparently Sam is not troubled by fantasies of her past, and a few lines later, Charly is called to be a counselor in the RS presidency “because [she] make[s] people feel loved and important—that’s more important than quilts” (68). She and Sam go into their “Lamanite phase,” doing good work among the Indian members in Rapid City; and that, too, of course, is part of what grownup marriage is about: not “be[ing] by ourselves” (58) but being in a community, serving it. Here we may (or must) suppose Sam and Charly do develop a friendship in shared goodness, positive “virtue” in something like Aristotle’s sense. A substantial novel might have given this more extended and detailed treatment.

A few months after their son Adam¹⁰ is born, their bishop, “concerned about the number of excommunications, spoke in behalf of fidelity” (74) and “closed with an interesting idea: ‘Brethren, if you must spend money on a woman, spend it on your wife. If you must have an affair, have it with your own wife’” (75). Sam and Charly try it and find that their staged-casual pickup meeting in a “cozy restaurant . . . was fun, it strengthened our love for each other, it insured that neither of us would need to have an actual affair, and it kept us intrigued with each other” (76). During their “mock affair,” she pretends to be divorced, he to be widowed. Revealing role-choices: Why would she imagine that as her way not to be Mrs. Sam? And who does she imagine brought suit? It’s a puzzling little episode: we hadn’t a clue that either was tempted in the slightest toward infidelity; if they were, it’s not clear how their “mock affair” would “insure” anything; and again, we have just too little experience of

their love or their intrigue for each other. I'm being too grudging here? Again it's an instance of the book's insistent cuteness. Its only clear bearing on the plot is its disturbance of Sam's later attempts to date women after Charly dies, when he's "overwhelmingly haunted by [her] memory" (76). Generally, this novel is "episodic" and nearly amnesiac: it has sequentiality, but not much continuity other than the names of its main characters; the "plot" is pretty loose, pretty much a matter of "incidents and accidents," as Paul Simon might put it, "hints and allegations."

One other significant incident in their sex life is a bedtime prayer Charly offers, asking for Sam to know "that it is sometimes blessed to receive" and for help to "get pregnant," which gets put "on hold for a long time" (59). Later there's a "little trip" away from the baby, aimed for a "romantic hide-away" (85), during which, stuck by circumstance, Sam and Charly end up sleeping in blankets on a floor next to three Indians and three dogs (87). In a way, that's as true a figure of marriage as many. Charly promises Sam, "I'm definitely going to make this up to you" (87). That's in March. Then, in another true figure, "It began in April with complaints of pain in her side" (89): Charly gets cancer—or rather is found to have it all through her body—in unlucky Chapter 13,¹¹ and she dies like a Christian wife in the next chapter, after telling Sam she'll "go ahead and find us a nice little mansion" and urging him to "look around for someone." "Find someone I can get along with. You're not only looking for a wife for you, but you're looking for a sister for me" (92-93).

Depending how you want to count it, her death or her dying does take up a lot more space than her wedding or her wedding night. (I'm sounding cynical.) Her parents love Sam after that. At the end, he and Adam head back to Salt Lake City "to find a home—well, at least a temporary home—until the time when we're called Home and we find out what Charly has arranged for us that will be more permanent" (98).

So in *Charly*, the body, where it appears as anything more than the unnamed site of "to make love" and the vessel of procreation (a perspiring forehead and dilation are mentioned in the birth scene), is the site of terminal cancer, of suffering that

nothing can finally relieve. Which is one of the terrible truths about the body. At the edge of the end, Sam "sat by her bed, and because of her thirst [how does he know?], put little drops of water one by one into her mouth"—as if she were Dives tormented in the flame, and Sam poor Lazarus let down to visit.¹² "I think she appreciated it, but she never gained consciousness enough to tell me. Then it was over. She died on my birthday" (96), he tells us; and then maybe to lift his own spirits, goes for another one-liner: "I've never been able to decide what she meant by that. I'm going to ask her when we meet again" (96).

In *Charly*, a good woman's final place is Home, waiting for dad and the boy to arrive, "arrang[ing] for us" (98). (I don't mean this wryly, I hope it is severe but fair to the text.) In that last line, she's an almost-Christ preparing a place for Sam and Adam. The "cultural myth" that goes unquestioned here, not purely Mormon, is that of the Sweet Young Girl/Wife as Angel, a sort of secular-sectarian echo of the Blessed Virgin, whom we encounter in American literature and pop culture everywhere from Hawthorne (Goodman Brown's "sweet, pretty wife" Faith is "a blessed angel on earth," and after his one-night stand in the woods he means to "cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven") and Edgar Allan Poe (the Lady Ligeia, the lost Lenore, Annabel Lee, et al., and Poe's notion that "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world") all the way down to a syrupy song on the radio in my adolescence, "Teen Angel."¹³

You could also say, rather truthfully, that Charly dies so that Sam and we might learn at least one explicit spiritual lesson. In Chapter 12, brought up short by a transient Indian's question, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" (83), Sam "set a goal to review the scriptures with the idea of trying to become closer to [Christ], to love him more fully," and it does work: Sam "began to see him as a man who could be reached and loved and cherished" (84). But the raising of Lazarus puzzles Sam: since Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus and restore happiness to Mary and Martha, "Why did he weep when he knew that their sorrow was only a breeding ground for their approaching joy? Why did he weep?" (84). Sam finds his answer, as he should, in the final chapter, "as [he] watche[s] Charly slowly become weaker" and

"want[s] to know how this appeared to the Savior. . . Did he understand the depths of my sorrow?" (95). It's a gauge of the novel's thinness that we don't have much chance to understand that; but let that pass. Here, Sam "remember[s] the raising of Lazarus" and realizes:

He wept because they wept and because he shared their sorrow. He wept because he loved them, and whatever grief they carried, even for a short time, he shared it with them. He would not leave me comfortless because he loves me, and he loves Charly, and he loves our son Adam. He wept because he loves us. (95)

Note the nice tense shift, past to present, from scriptural sisters' grief to Sam's grief now; and the poise of scriptural past and Sam's present in that last sentence: Weyland knows what he's doing here, and that "loves us" is also narrator and author speaking to reader, bringing the lesson home. It's a true lesson, too, and anyone who's learned it from the raising of Lazarus or anywhere else won't likely forget it, will carry it for consolation lifelong. Yet as always I am troubled at the sacrifice of a fictional character for the sake of a moral or spiritual lesson: it's not too much (though it's not the whole truth about this episode) to say that Charly is dying so we can learn this truth. Which in my case I already learned long ago, and do not here relearn with any freshness or keenness of experience.

For all its obvious and especially Mormon differences from its probable secular model, *Charly* seems faithful in the end to the message of Erich Segal's *Love Story* (New York: Harper, 1970; Signet, 1970): "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry" (91, 130). In the worst time of their marriage, half-camping in their unfinished South Dakota house with autumn coming on, Charly gets "sick of wading through five inches of dirt . . . tired of having to get up in the middle of the night and walk to an out-house . . . sick of sleeping on the floor and looking at boards where a wall should be . . . sick of this whole thing," and tells Sam if he "wanted a noble wife, someone to pull [his] handcart with [him, he] picked the wrong girl!" (61). When she finds out they're not getting any help from their ward because "They've offered, but [Sam] wouldn't accept it!", Charly and Sam get "locked into a tremendously

intricate game" in which they "must not show affection, . . . must remain distant, and . . . must refrain from communication except about trivial matters" (62), and Charly says "Sam, we're just like all the other unhappily married couples now, aren't we?" (62) (Old Tolstoy's wisdom¹⁴ reversed, which Scott Card also reverses in his *Turning Hearts* introduction: "Good people [or at least people trying to be good] are infinitely varied in their struggles; it is the unreliable, rootless, soon-to-be-gone, adolescent heroes who, ultimately, are all the same" [3].) Things get better when self-reliant Sam tells the bishop what's wrong and finally accepts help and "once again . . . became the object of a service project" (63). Marriage depends on community support, no doubt of that. But Charly never says "I'm sorry, Sam," nor does Sam ever say "Sorry, Charly."

Weyland's skinny novel does say one big thing more than Segal's: the lesson at Lazarus' tomb, that Love means you'll be sorry someday, when one you love dies, but Jesus is sorry with you. And that's something to know. Wealthy-but-disowned Oliver Barrett III, at a loss for words to describe making love with working-class Jennifer Cavilleri on their hard-working honeymoon, says, "Jenny and I were . . . kind to each other" (76)—a discovery Sam does not seem to make: that wedded sex is kindness. That's something to know, too. Yet neither of these skinny novels knows what Eudora Welty "knew about love" in "At the Landing" in 1943: "how it would have a different story in the world if it could lose the moral knowledge of a mystery that is in the other heart," and how "the secrecy of life was the terror of it" (245). Sam got a whiff of terror when Charly told him her secret, and turned his terror into meanness; but he got over it. Hearts in these little novels are without mysteries and without much moral knowledge. Which may be why these novels are short and sweet.

Marriage in both *Love Story* and *Charly* is short and sweet, with apparently little or no need for pardon between partners. Grant the dignity of the idea that "in short measures, life may perfect be," as Ben Jonson put it plain in his great memorial Ode on Cary and Morison.¹⁵ How short will you take your measure? Jane Eyre in her last chapter sings ten years and counting; the elegies of Oliver and Sam each subtend a mere few years. What, though, of the

long run? The slow spill of years that James Agee retrospectively, in "Sunday: Outskirts of Knoxville, Tennessee," imagined his parents in their young love plighting themselves to: "How this must end, that now please love were ended, / . . . Now on the winsome crumbling shelves of the horror / God show, God blind these children!"¹⁶ What, too, of sorrow not for pain or mortal sickness but for harm and betrayal? Not what we suffer but what we do, in the long run? Near the end of *The Pilgrim Hawk* (New York: Harper, 1940; Farrar, 1990), Glenway Wescott's elegant short novel about "their love and their trouble," his quasi-autobiographical narrator Alwyn Tower observes of "the long course of true love, especially marriage," that "in marriage, insult arises again and again and again; and pain has not only to be endured, but consented to; and the amount of forgiveness that it necessitates is incredible and exhausting" (106). Alwyn Tower's bachelorhood may well be confirmed by what he witnesses in this story. W. H. Auden wrote in his commonplace book *A Certain World* that "like everything which is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion but the creation of time and will, any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting and significant than any romance, however passionate" (248). Who is telling that long story, happy or unhappy?—the one Rilke, when his own marriage to Clara Westhoff had largely failed, called "the fate of two people who were making life difficult for each other" (21), "the two about whom so incredibly many things might be said, about whom no word has ever been said, though they suffer and act and don't know how to help themselves" (22)?

I turn again to the thought that maybe myths are not what we need, but rather we need novels, full-scale. Eliade tells us myth takes its participants out of historical time; but in my view novels rather relentlessly insist on just that experience of historical time (my strong instances would be Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*). Recourse to myth might indeed be a regression, where what we need most crucially to learn is to live in our historical time, to make our personal and marital histories that concrete and particular, no matter whether their more general shapes conform to some mythic plot or not. For all its abyssal depth and power, myth is abstract, generic, or at least a lot more abstract and

generic than novel, and when we find a myth in a novel, an archetypal pattern, as we so often say we do, that is usually at a level of subtext or abstraction such that, if taken as the "meaning" of the novel, it will elide most of the concrete and singular texture of the work, its specific detail and discrimination. The novelists I admire pursue the dense singularity of their characters' experience.

If, yes, we do need myths to get us through Mormon middle age, in any case we'll have them, the culture will continue to generate them. (*Charly* is a myth for the unmarried, and it might well set up middle-age problems for the youth whose marriages it helps to shape.) Yet because myth is always in some sizeable degree abstract or generic—archetypal, as we say—it won't quite do. It really might be a form of escapism, escape from the concrete historical time that we actually live in. Of course all fiction is escape from actual time into its own virtual time. Yet novelistic fiction normally attempts an adequate figure of historical time, not the construction of mythic or ritual time. For ritual time we Mormons have the temple endowment, and we need to use it for all it's worth. Here outside, what we need, I suspect, is a good deal of demythologization, not more mythology or mythologizing. I've read, for instance, the myth and interpretation of Skeleton Woman in Clarissa Estes's *Women Who Run with the Wolves* and that is a powerful figure for some of the tensions and conflicts and resolutions of marital experience.¹⁷ So I can admit the validity and uses of myth, but still insist on the crucial importance of novelistic fictions for what Milan Kundera would call interrogating or exploring "existence" as "the realm of human possibilities" (31, 42, 44).

Lately, re-reading Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), I've been struck again by Nussbaum's demonstrations of the fine-grained moral thinking novels enact, thinking right down to the syllable. She proposes

that there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty—that [can] be fully and adequately stated . . . only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. . . . only in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our

task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing. . . .

And what if it is love one is trying to understand . . . ? (3-4)

What, I would echo, if it is marriage? Further working out her project of philosophical and ethical literary criticism, Nussbaum says:

It seems plausible that in pursuit of . . . human self-understanding and of a society in which humanity can realize itself more fully—the imagination and the terms of the literary artist are indispensable guides: as [Henry] James suggests, angels of and in the fallen world, alert in perception and sympathy, lucidly bewildered, surprised by the intelligence of love. (53)

We shall need novels, I think, novels of the sort Nussbaum implicitly describes here, to imagine Mormon marriage in ways that will help us endure it and flourish in it. We shall need some long ones, long and even difficult, not the short and sweet, to tell the long stories of marriages, "the fate of two people who were making life difficult for each other."

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NOTES

1. Tessa has read and used Rollo May's *The Cry for Myth* (New York: Norton, 1991; Dell, 1992) in one or more classes.

2. I've asked Deseret Book for approximate numbers and been told it does not release that information (not even apparently to the nearest 10,000). My colleague Chris Crowe says he was told several years ago that sales had exceeded 250,000, which he suggests could mean a readership approaching one million; he also points out that the normal "shelf life" (a telling canned-goods metaphor) of a young adult novel is about two years, so *Charly* is clearly something of a cultural phenomenon. The copy I purchased in June 1996 when writing this paper is a third printing in paperback: the fact that the book is still in print after sixteen years says something. But what? Do its buyers and (one suspects) givers and receivers read it? And if so, how does it affect their attitudes? their lives?

3. In Book VIII, chapter 3 of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (ca. 330 BCE), Aristotle hierarchically distinguishes friendships based on utility (e.g., in commercial transactions or other forms of exchange or remunerated service), on pleasure (as are most youthful friendships, in his view), and on goodness and likeness in virtue (*aretè* or "excellence"). Despite his attitude that women, like slaves, are lesser creatures than men, Aristotle

in chapter 12 does consider the possibility of friendship in marriage including all three types. (See EN 1156a7-1156b24, 1162a16-28.)

4. The most useful brief discussion of the word *erôs* that I've encountered is in Terence Irwin's Glossary to his edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 397. Another helpful brief discussion of Greek terms translatable as "love" occurs in David Konstan's *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 12-13; Konstan stresses the passionate, infatuated, and even "transgressive" aspect of *erôs*.

5. Here I'm pleased to concur with Orson Scott Card, who in "Sermons in Critical Form" (1982) took Susan Wakefield to task for a *Sunstone Review* (1982) review of Weyland's first two books, *Charly* and its sequel *Sam* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1981). Card rightly, in my view, argues that Sam's male chauvinism is not endorsed by the implied author, who in the scene he quotes (more fully than Wakefield) from Sam clearly gives "all the good lines to the woman" (133). But I do have a lot of critical bones to pick with Card—little bothersome bones like you stack on the edge of your plate when you eat pan-fried trout—at least a few of which I'll try to note as this discussion proceeds.

6. The bishop's near-quotation from Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-16—"What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common" (15)—seems marvelously on-target. I would like to invoke a wider application of this voice's saying, together with God's (explicit and implicit) blessings on human sexuality in Genesis 1:27-31, to suggest that sex, *per se*, ought never to be called "unclean." No doubt I'm too "liberal" in this.

7. Or as Card, borrowing from Susan Howe, might put it, they write "within the context of . . . cultural myths" (130). A large part of my trouble with *Charly*, as I hope may become clear farther along, is that it seems uncritically to subscribe to other dubious myths, even as it clearly critiques one in the bishop's and stake president's responses to Sam. After my abbreviated presentation of this paper at the AML/ RMMLA Conjoint Session, a colleague who has been a BYU campus bishop told me the story of one young woman faced with behavior like Sam's, who rejected her fiancé and would not relent even when he attempted to repent of his hard words and uncharitable attitude. It's just not as easy as *Charly* makes out, though we all wish it were.

8. Shall I suppose this must be a lonely exception to Card's claim that "Weyland is almost always refreshingly free of cliché" (133)? Card stresses "dialogue and characterization" in this context, but I think a patient reader could accumulate a sizeable stack of clichés of all kinds from any page of *Charly*.

9. Could such forgetting be a mode of forgiveness? It's nice to think so, but I do suspect it's just a mark of a weakly imagined story.

10. Named as if Sam and Charly were heavenly parents starting a new world. Which, in a (Mormon cultural) mythic sense, they are.

11. It's probably inappropriate of me to recall that this little sequence, youthful sexual invitation, promise, or expectation followed fast (as if required) by bodily devastation is the staple archetypal diet of slasher films (which I've seen only in versions edited for network TV, so my perceptions may be skewed)—all those sex-happy camp counselors disemboweled or decapitated on dismal nights by ubiquitous prowling psychotic killers. But then slasher films, with this heavy-handed linkage of sex and violent death, also express some sort of cultural myth. For all their exploitation of its teasing imagery, surely such films simply hate sex. Whose side are they on? Ostensibly *Charly*, the novel, likes sex. But, for reasons mostly accumulated by this point, I have to wonder.

12. I do mean to suggest that the novel puts Charly in hell as she dies, before it grants her apotheosis as Our Lady of the Nice Little Mansion. I do not mean at all to downplay the actual and terrible, immitigable suffering of the terminally ill in "real life." But the events of a novel express the imaginative choices of its implied author, and it is

hard not to read the "plot" here as imposing a final punishment on the "unclean" Charly who became a "new person" through baptism and conversion. She dies almost as hard as Emma Bovary, as blessedly as Clarissa. Having sketched the shape of a (rather derivative?) cultural myth here—dying child-bride as spun-sugar angel, obscurely tortured for and in her sexual body—I'm tempted to leave decipherment of its significance to subtler critics of culture. Yet I do recall something of the pre-publication ad campaign for Charly, which might offer some telling evidence: large (in my memory, at least quarter-page) closeup photos of a fetching model's face, at once sweet and sexy, with windswept hair wisping to touch cheeks and chin, lips (the lower one notably full) parted on gleaming incisors, an up-from-under glance of (what the cover's color version would show as green) eyes, feathery lashes and brows, and the caption "Charly Is Coming": this was an Advent. One wonders what became of the model who posed for that picture.

13. For Hawthorne, see paragraphs three and seven of "Young Goodman Brown" in any collection of the *Tales*, where the phrases obviously reveal Goodman Brown's sentimental picture of his anxious wife, and his own bad faith. For Poe, most standard anthology selections include one or all of the works alluded to: the tale "Ligeia," the poems "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven." Paragraph twenty of Poe's essay on "The Raven," "The Philosophy of Composition," provides the quoted clause, though the final page of his "Poetic Principle" makes similar claims (minus her death) about "woman" as quintessential poetic inspiration. With some slight wistful regret, I do not recall who sang "Teen Angel," though I likely could still croon a stanza and the chorus myself.

The larger American literary-cultural issue here was raised in almost-definitive form decades ago by Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960, rev. ed., 1966. New York: Stein & Day, 1982), where he claims that classic American (male) novelists, from Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville down to Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, all fail to imagine a "passionate encounter" (much less a marriage) between their (archetypically American Innocent Runaway) heroes and "any full-fledged, [sexually] mature women" (24). Erich Segal in *Love Story* (1970) might fairly be said to have capitalized handsomely on that traditional defect and defection. Most of Scott Card's strictures in his *Turning Hearts* introduction against the "adolescence" of (especially) contemporary American fiction (2-3) sound like warmed-over Fiedler to me (still strong food, to be sure), and I honestly can't figure what novels he's been reading—Robert James Waller's *Bridges of Madison County* (New York: Warner, 1992) perhaps. The larger claim that I hope to make, in the long essay from which this short one sprang, is that since the 1960s American writers, both men and women, have rather substantially, though not without difficulty, imagined just what Fiedler and Card say American fiction lacks: credibly responsible (if imperfect) marriages between credibly grownup men and women. It has begun to happen in Mormon fiction too, but Weyland's early work shows what our writers have had—and still have—to work their way up from.

14. The famous opening sentence of *Anna Karenina* (1875-78), trans. Constance Garnett (1901): "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Doesn't it seem that the message of Mormon culture to its families comes close to that first clause? Happy families should be all alike, or should find or make their happiness by all following the same simple "plan of happiness"? And in many areas of Mormon culture presently, one dominant theme seems to be: we'll all be a lot happier when we're all a lot more alike. Of course, notable voices do continue to call for tolerance of "diversity" at the same time that others denounce "dissent." I do heartily agree with Card's claim that the struggles of people trying to be good (what else is fiction about?) are infinitely varied and interesting, if seriously hard to write

well. In this context again I remind myself that at the (mono)mythic level, all heroes and all quests are all alike.

15. "To the immortal memorie, and friendship of that noble paire, Sir Lucius Cary, and Sir H. Morison" (elsewhere called an "Ode Pindarick"), in *Ben Jonson*, Vol. 8, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (London: Oxford UP, 1947): 245, line 74. I've modernized spelling in one instance.

16. *Collected Poems*, ed. Robert Fitzgerald (Boston: Houghton, 1968), 68. Agee's fictionalized portrait of his parents' marriage, in the first chapters of his beautiful unfinished Pulitzer Prize novel *A Death in the Family* (New York: McDowell, 1957), is less anguished and more comic—at least until it ends in a cruelly ironic one-in-a-million car accident. The wife prays, "Make us one in Thee as we are one in earthly wedlock" (53), and God appears to answer her with subtraction: 2 - 1 = 1.

17. Thanks to my colleague GaeLyn Henderson for calling Estes's chapter on Skeleton Woman to my attention.

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Singing with Something Less Than One Accord

Levi S. Peterson

About the time I was eight, my mother hoped to civilize me through music and forced me to take piano lessons. I'm sorry to report that I anticipated the approach of piano practice each day with the dread of a galley slave being manacled to his oar. It will be obvious that I came to enjoy hymns at church by default rather than by preference. There was no evading Sunday meetings, where hymns provided an infusion of sound, imagery, and meaning amidst the general monotony of lessons, prayers, and sermons. Slowly their melodies and snatches of their lyrics entered my affections and, over the years, became associated with a wide variety of experiences, many of them far removed from a church house. It is with some of these experiences and the particular hymns that evoke them that I wish to deal in this essay.

As an adult I have sung from hymnbooks published in 1948 and 1985. The hymnbook of my childhood was *Deseret Sunday School Songs*, published in 1909 by the Deseret Sunday School Union. When the Church Music Committee published a replacement for this hymnal in 1927, Snowflake Ward, like many other wards, perversely refused to switch.

The power that hymns had over my boyish imagination is illustrated by "Each Cooing Dove," which I am sorry to say has been eliminated from the current hymnal.

Each cooing dove and sighing bough
That makes the eve so blest to me
Has something far diviner now
It bears me back to Galilee.

The lyrics of this hymn create a nostalgic fantasy about the ministry of Jesus in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee. I loved its sweet, languid, sentimental music as a boy, and I love it still.

O Galilee! sweet Galilee!
Where Jesus loved so much to be;

O Galilee! blue Galilee!
Come sing thy song again to me. (1948, #38)

While this hymn was being sung, I could clearly imagine a mourning dove settled among the leaves of a cottonwood tree along Silver Creek, whose muddy, oft-recycled waters irrigated a narrow band of fields near Snowflake. Wild mourning doves were migratory visitors to the fields and barnyards around Snowflake each summer and fall, and I was familiar with their delicate cooing, which seemed distant even when they perched nearby. As for Jesus, I could create only the vaguest picture of him beside a large blue body of water, quite unlike anything I had experienced in reality. The only large body of water with which I was familiar was Flake's reservoir, which was as brown and silted as the creek itself.

I associated this reservoir with another hymn, "Master, the Tempest Is Raging." This hymn, happily included in the current hymnal, is a splendid awakener for a somnolent congregation ("Master, the tempest is raging! / The billows are tossing high!" / The sky is o'ershadowed with blackness. / No shelter or help is nigh") and ought to be sung far more often than it is nowadays. Its music rises to a climax ("Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea / Or demons or men or whatever it be . . .") and falls away into calmness ("They all shall sweetly obey thy will . . ." 1985, #105), correlating nicely with lyrics embellished by onomatopoeia, alliteration, and other poetic effects.

In northern Arizona the wind blows fiercely during the spring, and I had been impressed by large waves crashing against the rock-lined levee of Flake's reservoir. I recall what might have been the first time I observed this phenomenon at the age of six or seven. I stood transfixed by wonder over the size and the power of the waves, and I, who had never seen the ocean, said to myself, "This is what the ocean is like." Thereafter, when "Master, The Tempest Is

Raging" was sung in church, I had the materials to create a realistic image of the apostles laboring at the oars of a boat on Flake's reservoir. I do not recall whether I imagined Jesus asleep in the bottom of the boat.

Another kind of gratification to be associated with hymns during my childhood was the presence of my parents in church, especially my mother. My father, who was a counselor in the stake presidency till I was six, used to doze comfortably on the stand during services. My mother, even more profoundly asleep, sat in the congregation beside me and my brothers, whose duty it was to elbow her awake for partaking of the sacrament. She always awoke while hymns were sung; and though she judged her own voice to be inferior, it actually blended pleasantly with the voices of the congregation. I clearly remember her singing "The Lord Is My Light." Perhaps it's the fervor with which my mother sang that brings this hymn back so vividly across these fifty years. Certainly its tempo is unflinching, admitting of no doubt, and its lyrics are designed to elevate the gloomy and reassure the timid:

The Lord is my light; then why should I fear?
By day and by night his presence is near.
He is my salvation from sorrow and sin;
This blessed assurance the Spirit doth bring.
(1985, #89)

After I became an adult, my mother told me that her father, bishop of a frontier village for twenty-seven years, had sung hymns in the fields to relieve his sorrows, and I now think my mother sang hymns for the same reason. Perhaps she had no more than her share of troubles, but certainly she had no less. She often waded through the Slough of Despond and needed something to lift her out. So she sang "The Lord Is My Light," as well as many another hymn, with an ardent sincerity. As for me, I had not learned to recognize troubles, and I associated these hymns with a confident, courageous mother.

Although I hated the tedium of church, the satisfaction of being there with my mother became an indelible expectation; and even now I cannot altogether divest myself of a feeling that my mother is sitting beside me while hymns are being sung. Something of the same expectation regarding the

presence of my father possesses me as well, and the truth is that I associate hymn singing with all the good brothers and sisters of Snowflake Ward whose bulky bodies, reverent faces, and raspy voices were a comfort to my early years. A great deal of my reason for attending church today is the shadowy presence I feel there of my mother and father and many another good person who can be revisited only in a cemetery.

St. Augustine wrote that hymns are songs of praise to God. His frequently repeated definition is convenient though incomplete. As a genre, hymns express not only praise but a variety of emotions, motivations, and doctrinal formulations, all reinforcing a way of life with the quest for salvation at its center.

As I think of hymns devoted largely to praise, I recall the "Doxology," whose very title denotes an act of emphatic praise. Even though this title is no longer used in our Mormon meetings, the hymn itself is still popular, often chosen on the spur of the moment to close meetings that have run beyond their scheduled time. In the 1909 hymnal, the tune is set in ponderous two-two time, which lends a deliberate force to the singing of it, something like hitting an iron rail repeatedly with a sledge hammer.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
(1909, #85; 1985, #242)

As a boy, I rejoiced in the brevity of this hymn. I was also intrigued by the term "Holy Ghost," because I considered ghosts to be gruesome spirits who haunt mortals and I wondered how such a being could be called holy. As an adult, I am pleased to recognize that this hymn comes from the Genevan Psalter, reaching back to John Calvin through the strain of Puritanism from which frontier Mormonism grew. Furthermore, the central theological problem of Christianity, the nature of the Godhead, lies at its heart. The formulation of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is not often repeated in the Mormon liturgy, so it was probably this very hymn that taught me the paradox of the Trinity, which is that God, though one, is also three. I now recognize that its lyrics are

founded in the Nicean Creed, which resolves the paradox by asserting that God is one in substance but three in person. Many Latter-day Saints scorn this solution as absurd. I don't find it any more absurd than the Mormon solution, which declares the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be discrete divine individuals who have not created the material universe but manage to govern it through an unexplained spiritual technology. So whenever this hymn is sung, I enjoy thinking about Christians who quarrel over equally nondemonstrable theories of the divine.

I am also reminded of my reluctance to praise God in the privacy of my own emotions, a reluctance which seems to arise partly from my masculine inhibition about expressing intimate emotion of any kind and partly from my ignorance of God's whereabouts. A sense of God's immediacy is not among the spiritual gifts I enjoy. To a considerable degree I am a vicarious or a sympathetic worshiper of the Christian God. Intuiting and internalizing the reverence of those about me, I am swept along by the communal act of singing a hymn of praise, and I often identify with and appreciate a special fervor among the Latter-day Saints deriving from their belief in a restoration of the spiritual gifts manifested by primitive Christianity. I feel this fervor especially in that uniquely Mormon hymn "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning." Its lyrics were composed by the earliest Mormon hymn writer, William W. Phelps, who assisted Emma Smith in the compilation of the first Mormon hymnal, published in 1835. The hymn was sung at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, where the most remarkable collective manifestations of the spirit in the history of Mormonism were experienced.

We'll sing and we'll shout with the armies of
heaven,
Hosanna, hosanna to God and the Lamb!
Let glory to them in the highest be given,
Henceforth and forever, Amen and amen!
(1985, #2)

I like this hymn best when it is sung by a large group like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. It invariably stirs me and makes me forget that I am a doubter. I grasp anew the genius of Mormonism—its

seemingly endless youth, its self-confidence, its refusal to compromise with other versions of Christianity, and its ability to blithely ignore facts that seem contrary to testimony.

To a considerable degree, the fervor and conviction of Mormonism derives from its founder, Joseph Smith, who is celebrated in a number of distinctly Mormon hymns. I gathered some of my earliest impressions about the prophetic character of Joseph Smith from "An Angel from On High" (1985, #13), which celebrates Moroni's delivery of the golden plates, and "Joseph Smith's First Prayer" (1985, #26), which recounts the First Vision. Of much greater interest to my adult mind has been that resounding and astonishing anthem, "Praise to the Man," composed by William W. Phelps soon after the assassination of the Prophet in 1844.

Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!
Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer.
Blessed to open the last dispensation,
Kings shall extol him, and nations revere.

Hail to the Prophet, ascended to heaven!
Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain—
Mingling with Gods, he can plan for his brethren;
Death cannot conquer the hero again.
(1985, #27)

High energy, relentless progressions, and quick descents mark the old folk tune to which these lyrics have been set. The hymn, designed to rally Joseph's stunned followers, proclaims his paramount position among prophets in the history of the world. It asserts that nations will recognize his supremacy. It shows him fraternizing with deities in heaven.

Singing this hymn, I think of Joseph's insuperable charisma. I think of him translating the gold plates by peering at a peep stone in a hat. I think of him taking Vilate Kimball as a plural wife, relenting only after she and her husband had sorrowfully bent their will to his. I think of him in a general's uniform, mounted at the head of the Nauvoo Legion. I think of his power over his followers these hundred and fifty-odd years since he died. As we see from this hymn, the Latter-day Saints have done more than beatify the founder of their religion; they have come close to making a deity of him.

The Latter-day Saints come close to deifying their

living prophet too, as I was reminded several years ago by one of the most singular incidents of hymn-singing I have ever witnessed.

On a summer evening my wife and I attended an outdoor drama at Clarkston, a village in northern Utah where Martin Harris is buried. After a hearty dinner in the recreation hall, an audience of three or four hundred assembled on bleachers on a hillside. While we waited for the play to begin, the green fields of Cache Valley slowly disappeared in the balmy dusk, and far away the Logan temple began to glow. Suddenly there was a murmur. Looking toward the center of the bleachers, we saw ushers assisting the frail, aging president of the Church, Ezra Taft Benson, and his wife Flora, to their seats. Instantly the audience, sitting on the rickety bleachers, burst into the hymn "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" (1985, #19). It was vigorous, loud, and completely spontaneous, without any visible coordination or direction.

I did not respect Ezra Taft Benson as an apostle. I feared his dogmatic interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, his thinly veiled hints that liberal politicians were traitors, his insistence that faithful Mormons be ultra conservative in their politics. Yet when the audience on the bleachers at Clarkston broke into an expression of gratitude for the presence of their prophet, I responded with deep feeling, and I realized that the office and position of prophet is far greater than the individual who occupies it. For some nine million people the prophet has become the focal point of the belief that mortal human nature can achieve a degree of moral and spiritual perfection.

I make a different association between another hymn and another General Authority whom I could not respect—Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, noted authority on Mormon doctrine, who died from cancer in 1985. An exceptional devotion to Christ may be attributed to Elder McConkie, who authored not only a multivolume theological treatise about Christ but also a simple hymn that has been included in the hymnbook of 1985. The present chorister of my ward loves this hymn, so I have sung it many times in recent years. "I believe in Christ; he is my King!" it begins. "With all my heart to him I'll sing." It praises Christ's personal ministry: "He healed the sick; the dead he raised. / Good works were his; his

name be praised" (1985, #134).

As I say, I intuit an exceptional devotion in these lyrics. Yet I must confess that these lyrics, rather than evoking reverence for Christ, are an uncomfortable reminder of Elder McConkie and his famed intolerance of members who questioned church authorities. An abundant folklore has portrayed him as being less than humble in his apostolic calling. It appears he was very willing to pull rank, very quick to remind people that his position was in itself evidence that his convictions had God's endorsement while theirs did not.

My thoughts also stray to stories about his death. Even in the final days of his illness, so I was told, Elder McConkie arose each morning, dressed in suit and tie, and lay again on his bed, demonstrating his faith that God could, if he chose, heal him and send him back to work on that very day. But of course God chose not to heal him, and the lesson I learn from that fact is that prophets and apostles depart this world in the same manner as the rest of us. No dispensation is made for them from the ordinary ills of mortality, as I am reminded each time I sing Elder McConkie's hymn.

I associate other hymns with deaths that have touched me more personally. I was nine when my father died, and at his funeral I heard "O My Father" for the first time that I can remember. Composed by Eliza R. Snow, this hymn has the weight of scripture among the Mormon population because of its reference to a Heavenly Mother. But that first hearing fixed my attention on its seeming reference to my mortal father, who had died only two days earlier:

O my Father, thou that dwellest
In the high and glorious place,
When shall I regain thy presence
And again behold thy face?
In thy holy habitation
Did my spirit once reside?
In my first primeval childhood,
Was I nurtured near thy side? (1985, #292)

Wasn't it true that my mortal father had gone to dwell in a high and glorious place? Hadn't I been nurtured near his side? Wasn't it reasonable to ask when I would regain his presence? So completely did I apply this hymn to my own circumstances that

even now it makes me think of losing my father when I was nine. I love the hymn and feel lucky to be present wherever it is sung, yet invariably I grieve. From the moment of his burial, my father's absence has seemed absolute, and the day when I shall regain his presence remains so remote in time and space that its prospect rarely gives me comfort.

I have imputed tragic dimensions to this hymn because of the particulars of my own experience. Certain other hymns have tragic implications of a more public sort, expressing tragic emotion common to Mormons generally. As "Praise to the Man" reminds us, the Latter-day Saints continue to mourn the death of Joseph Smith, which Joseph Fielding Smith has called "the greatest sorrow" (317) in the history of Mormondom. Many, I among them, associate "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" (1985, #29) with the Prophet's death because John Taylor, at the Prophet's request, sang this hymn while they waited their destiny on that gloomy afternoon in Carthage Jail.

I also associate tragedy with "Come, Come, Ye Saints" (1985, #30), perhaps my favorite Mormon hymn, which was sung at all seasons during my childhood but is now sung only in connection with the celebration of Pioneer Day on July 24. Some may object to calling it tragic since it was expressly composed to encourage the Saints in their epic migration to the Rocky Mountains. I for one recall from the history of my own family too many lonely graves, too many separations, too many lives spent in bare subsistence, to respond to this evocation of the pioneer past with anything short of grief.

Even more important in terms of a public celebration of tragedy are the sacrament hymns sung by the Mormons. I count twenty-eight in the current hymn book. Each Sunday one of them is sung as a prelude to the blessing and distribution of bread and water, symbols of Christ's body and blood. All are set to calm, dignified music. Typically, as the following hymn shows, they call on the congregation to remember that Christ suffered and died for their sins, that they must honor him by obeying his commandments, and that they may rejoice in the prospect of salvation:

While of these emblems we partake
In Jesus' name and for his sake,

Let us remember and be sure
Our hearts and hands are clean and pure.

For us the blood of Christ was shed;
For us on Calvary's cross he bled,
And thus dispelled the awful gloom
That else were this creation's doom.

The law was broken; Jesus died
That justice might be satisfied,
That man might not remain a slave
Of death, of hell, or of the grave,

But rise triumphant from the tomb,
And in eternal splendor bloom,
Freed from the pow'r of death and pain,
With Christ, the Lord, to rule and reign.
(1985, #174)

My favorite sacrament hymn is "There Is a Green Hill Far Away" (1985, #94). However, I like the one I have cited very much too. True to its genre, "While of These Emblems" progresses from tragedy to triumph, allowing the worshiper, if he or she chooses, to ignore the horrors of the crucifixion and dwell upon the beatitude of the redemption. Yet those horrors are implicit in the hymn. The sacrament expressly invites us to remember Christ's mangled body and coagulated blood. Sometimes, while a sacrament hymn is sung, I ponder the enigmas of mortality. How can the moral imperfections of an entire species be ransomed by the death of a single deity? What weird law ordains an exchange of that sort? Why does death have to be so horrifying? Why must matter and spirit be wrenched apart by violence, disease, and old age?

Frequently something within a hymn, a certain line or phrase or a particular succession of notes, touches my emotions, and I move beyond these perplexing questions and consider whether indeed I might someday in eternal splendor bloom. I rarely meditate on my personal worthiness during a sacrament service. My conscience and my appetites long ago came to a stalemate in the battle for my soul, and I despair of reengaging the conflict. I am so locked in mortality, so doubtful of an afterlife, that I have little energy for imagining what might happen to me on a judgment day. Nonetheless, as I say, sometimes a sacrament hymn touches me with the hope that the wings of grace are real, that sinners

will rise from the ashes of death, that even doubters will see their departed loved ones again. That would be a ransom indeed.

Having alluded to the commandments, I will note my ambivalence toward hymns that emphasize obedience and righteous living. I admire many hymns for their practical advice on the achievement of social harmony. We are urged to practice love at home by one hymn (1985, #294). "Nay, speak no ill" (1987, #233) admonishes another—a sentiment aimed at suppressing gossip in the local congregation. Yet another exhorts, "School thy feelings, O my brother; / Train thy warm, impulsive soul" (1985, #336). I feel more dubious about organizational or recruitment hymns. I recall a hymn from the 1909 hymnal that tried to stir enthusiasm for attending Sunday School: "Never be late, never be late; Children, remember the warning: Try to be there, always be there, Promptly at ten in the morning" (1909, #79). I scorned that hymn from the first moment of understanding it. Other cheery hymns attempt to mobilize us for active duty in the affairs of the kingdom. "We Are All Enlisted" (1985, #250) and "Onward, Christian Soldiers" (1985, #246) are clear examples of this sort. Somewhat less jaunty but equally bent upon commandeering the energies of the Saints is "I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go":

It may not be on the mountain height
Or over the stormy sea,
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me.
But if, by a still, small voice he calls
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine:
I'll go where you want me to go.

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain or plain or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be. (1985, #270)

The hymnbook instructs us to sing this hymn "resolutely." That doesn't seem quite the right term. Though not unpleasant, the music is almost lethargic, and the lyrics propound a surrender of the self to God's will. Somehow I can't connect resoluteness with surrender. Self-abnegation is not something I'm very good at, having always had an appetite for

doing things my own way. Nonetheless, as I turned twenty-one in the fall of 1954, I surrendered to somebody's will, my mother's and my bishop's if not God's, and accepted a call to the French Mission. I can't remember whether the foregoing hymn was sung at my farewell. However, whenever I hear this hymn at missionary farewells in the 33rd Ward, as I frequently do, I have to reflect on how poorly I adjusted to the regimen of my own mission.

In Paris the mission president told the newly arrived missionaries that he needed a piano player in Switzerland. When no one else spoke up, I raised my hand. So I went to Switzerland while the others were exiled to Belgium. Hymn singing in our branch at La-Chaux-de-Fonds was at a survival level. The congregation consisted of eight or ten women of advancing years and quavering voices. The chorister was my senior companion, a farm boy from Alberta. If there was rhythm in his manner of conducting, I failed to discern it. As for my part, I played the accompaniment on a small pump organ with only my right hand on the keyboard because I wasn't skilled enough to add the left. Thus we raised a joyful noise unto the Lord.

As I have said elsewhere (19), I came to doubt the doctrine a missionary is required to preach, and my doubt became an issue in the summer of 1955 when I was made a senior companion and transferred to Charleroi, Belgium. After an attempt to leave the mission, I decided to stay on, principally because my loved ones at home would have been nonplussed and grieved by my early return. In retrospect I'm glad I stayed, but at that moment I felt coerced and violated. As a result of this episode, I also learned to hate my mission president. For years afterward I consoled myself with the fantasy that when he died, I would locate his grave and urinate on it. So much for being what the Lord wanted me to be.

I spent the last half of my mission in Liège, Belgium, where I was much happier for a variety of reasons. For one thing, the branch in Liège had a church with chapel and recreation hall and a membership numerous enough to provide many of the social pleasures I had known at home. Hymn singing in Liège was of a much higher quality than in La Chaux-de-Fonds. I will note that Mormon congregations everywhere in the mission sang hymns translated from English into French and published in 1954

as *Hymnes: Église de Jesus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours*. Blithely unaware of my ethnocentricity, I enjoyed singing hymns with which I was already familiar. Only later did I come to regret that I had lived for two and a half years in French-speaking countries without much exposure to their own rich tradition of hymns composed in French.

On my last Sunday in Liège Branch, I delivered a farewell sermon, and the congregation sang "God Be With You Till We Meet Again" in French:

Dieu soit avec toi jusqu'au revoir!
Qu'il te guide en toutes choses!
Que Sa paix sur toi repose!
Dieu soit avec toi jusqu'au revoir!

O joyeuse et sainte espérance
Pour ceux qui suivent Jésus!
Nous nous verrons en Sa présence
Quant la mort, le deuil ne seront plus!
(1954, #103)

I've heard this hymn in English countless times. It's a perennial favorite at funerals, missionary farewells, and other occasions of saying goodbye. Its soft, gentle music and simple, yearning lyrics have often consoled me. Despite imminent departures and looming absences, I have often been persuaded all will be well. I did not, however, feel this reassurance while the good people of Liège sang this hymn at the end of my mission. As they began to sing, my composure broke. I began to sob and did not stop till the service was over and I had finished shaking hands and exchanging hugs with dozens of people. I knew I would never return, would never see them again, and I could take no comfort in the abstract idea of a distant reunion in heaven. Yet there was health in this evidence that I had bonded with the Saints of Liège. No longer could I view my mission as a kind of house arrest, an enforced confinement, on an alien territory. I could appreciate now that my mission had added to my vitality, enhanced my level of civilization, made me sensitive to the values of cultures not my own.

By way of conclusion, I will briefly mention a couple more of the ways hymns have affected and influenced my life. One evening shortly after the 1985 Mormon hymnal had been published, Lavina Fielding Anderson and her husband, Paul, invited a

number of friends to their house in Salt Lake City to sing both new and traditional hymns included in the book. Paul, as many will recognize, is the author of four of the new hymns—an impressive record indeed. Althea and I accepted the Andersons' invitation with some trepidation, having never before attended a social event consisting entirely of hymn singing. It turned out to be a very satisfying experience. We also learned that each evening the Andersons hold an informal family service in which they and their son each choose a hymn to sing, read from the scriptures, and pray, a practice they continue to this day.

I bring up this experience particularly because, as everyone knows, Lavina was excommunicated from the church in September 1993 for writing a chronology detailing cases of what she has called spiritual abuse. I will not elaborate on her excommunication in this paper except to say it is most astonishing to see a person of such sincere and eager reverence put out of the Church. I am led to this further observation that a great many intelligent and competent Mormon women like Lavina find themselves humiliated and stifled by the patriarchal structure of the Church.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the hymns of the Latter-day Saints are replete with the signs of patriarchy, as retired BYU English professor Jean Anne Waterstradt has pointed out in an analysis of the sexist language in the 1985 hymnal. Sometimes that language is defamatory toward women, using feminine terms in pejorative situations. More often the language is exclusionary; that is, it makes no reference whatsoever to women even though they constitute a full half of the Christian population. This analysis provides dozens of instances like these in the following quotation:

"Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee" (#141) speaks of the "Savior of mankind." In "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire" (#145) the Christian is referred to with *he* and *his*. "Gently Raise the Sacred Strain" (#146) assigns the benefits of the Sabbath to man—"That man may rest, / And return his thanks to God." (#192)¹

No longer can I sing most Mormon hymns without reflecting, at least momentarily, how they fail to address themselves to women. Hymn singing now

reminds me that for untold centuries men have dealt with women as religious dependents, as children of sorts whose spiritual interests must be represented by men.

This leads me finally to the hymns sung at a memorial service for Virginia Sorensen in Provo in January 1992. Sorensen, raised in central Utah, spent most of her adult years outside Utah and is noted as one of the earliest Mormon novelists to gain respect beyond the borders of Mormondom. During her final years, she converted to the Anglican religion of her second husband, Alec Waugh. When Waugh died, she sent his ashes home to England and instructed that hers be sent home to Utah.

At the memorial service, a close friend, Shirley Brockbank Paxman, told us that, visiting Utah only three months before her death, Sorensen had seen early snow on Timpanogos and exclaimed, "My mountain! My mountain covered with snow!" At the conclusion of the service, the congregation sang "O Ye Mountains High" (1985, #34), a favorite of Sorensen's. I wept as did many others. A number of lovely old Mormon hymns celebrate the Utah homeland, among them "Our Mountain Home So Dear" (1985, #33), "For the Strength of the Hills" (1985, #35), and "Land of the Mountains High," whose patriotic refrain forthrightly repeats: "Utah, we love thee" (1948, #140). I am susceptible to all of them, even the last mentioned, which has been dropped from the current hymnbook.

After the service a dozen or more of us went to the Provo cemetery, where Sorensen's ashes were interred beside the graves of her parents and sister. Monroe Paxman dedicated the grave site by a simple Christian prayer. Dark-boughed fir trees stood closely about; and in the distance, clearly visible on that January day, rose the snowy heights of Timpanogos. It was the first time I had ever entered the Provo cemetery, where, as I was aware, my former mission president had been buried. My old ambition to urinate on his grave had deserted me long before. I was in a pensive mood, very conscious of how the ever-widening past converges on each new moment of the present.

At the memorial service a young woman with long flaxen hair, Lisa Rasmussen Arrington, had sung a hymn I had never heard before. She accompanied herself on the piano, and her voice might have come

from Valhalla. She sang "Adam-ondiAhman," a haunting celebration of the earth's first paradise, Eden, and of its restoration with the Second Coming.

This earth was once a garden place,
With all her glories common,
And men did live a holy race,
And worship Jesus face to face,
In Adam-ondi-Ahman.

We read that Enoch walked with God,
Above the pow'r of Mammon,
While Zion spread herself abroad,
And Saints and angels sang aloud,
In Adam-ondi-Ahman. (1985, #49)

This quaint hymn stirred subliminal meanings. I asked a friend whether it was in the hymnbook. She said it was. How had I missed it? Composed by William W. Phelps and included in the first Latter-day Saint hymnbook, it reflects Joseph Smith's certainty that Missouri was a place blessed above all other places. He located the Garden of Eden in Missouri and called it Adam-ondi-Ahman. He declared Missouri the location of the New Jerusalem, capital city of the world during the Millennium.

With this hymn echoing in my mind, I stood in the Provo cemetery reflecting on how new, yet old, were the experiences of this day. I thought about the curious, uncanny revelations of the Prophet; about the exodus of the Saints to the Rocky Mountains; about my own ancestors who went south into Arizona; about my harsh, tactless mission president, a poor mortal doing his best and deserving the same forgiveness that I hope for myself; about Virginia Sorensen, who dropped out of Mormonism but still came home to Utah. A sense came over me of how inexpressibly strange, how marvelously grand, it is to be a Mormon. If I had my life to live over, I wouldn't live it any other way.

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NOTES

1. Jean Anne Waterstradt, "In Hims of Praise: The Songs of Zion," *Association for Mormon Letters Annual 1994*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1994), 2:192. See also Karen Lynn, "Measuring the Achievement of the New RLDS Hymnal," *Mormon Letters Annual, 1984* (Salt Lake City: AML, 1985), 124-28; and Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

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The Rhetorical Self-Definitions of Sister Missionaries, 1930-1970: Oral Histories

Jessie L. Embry

INTRODUCTION

I served as an LDS missionary in the Canadian Maritime Provinces from 1974 to 1976. While I have some fond memories, it was definitely not the best year and a half of my life. Since then I wondered if my experience was typical or atypical. But when I tried to research the topic, I discovered there was very little information on LDS women missionaries and the extensive research on women in other denominations did not apply to the Mormon experience.

So I decided to conduct an oral history project. I received small grants from the Women's Research Institute at Brigham Young University in 1992 and 1994 to conduct these interviews. Then, to contact the women, I asked BYU's Public Communications Department to distribute a press release.

I hired Rebecca Ream Vorimo, a BYU history student, to do the interviews. She had worked for the Redd Center as a transcriber and had served a mission from June 1990 to November 1991. She had been called to the Spain Seville Mission; but because she was unable to obtain a visa for Spain, she spent several months in the Washington D.C. North and the Mexico Mexico City North missions before receiving her final assignment to the Mexico Torreón Mission. Rebecca was an excellent interviewer because her own mission experiences were fresh enough that she could relate easily with the women. Because Rebecca was a full-time student and because the Redd Center had limited funds, location became the most important factor in selecting interviewees. Most of the interviewees were living in Utah Valley and a few resided in Salt Lake County. Rebecca conducted fifty-six of the sixty Redd Center interviews.

Rebecca and I developed an interview outline. It included questions about early religious experiences,

the decision to serve a mission, the reaction of family and friends to the call, finances, training before leaving on the mission, travel to the mission field, first impressions of the area, experiences contacting people, and relationships with companions, other missionaries, and mission presidents. The concluding questions were about the woman's greatest success and challenge on her mission and the effect of the mission on her life.

As Rebecca conducted the interviews, she noticed some common trends. Some people needed to be asked all the questions on the outline. Others talked about their missions as if they had rehearsed stories. Those who did not have to be asked many questions recited their missions in two ways. Some gave a chronological listing of their areas and their experiences in those areas. Others listed all their experiences tracting, all their experiences with companions, and all their teaching experiences together.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS MISSIONARIES

What did I learn from my study? After completing the interviews, I read through them many times and tried to answer that question. What I discovered, though, was that all the stories sounded very much the same whether the women served in the 1930s or the 1960s. And their narratives were very similar to what I might have said about my own mission. We all spent most our time knocking on doors. We all contacted people in public places. But the goal (finding people to talk to) and the results (not very successful) were the same.

True, there were some differences. The missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s had no standard lessons; they handed out pamphlets (tracts). When people were willing to listen, they decided what to discuss at their gatherings (cottage meetings). During the early

1950s, some missions adopted formal lessons, and eventually the Church developed standard discussions. Early sister missionaries also worked with members more often and were mission stenographers.

Despite these variations, the stories in the oral histories sounded the same. Missionaries remembered dramatic stories of success or failure. They rarely told routine experiences. Their missions were turning points in their lives where they made important decisions about their religious beliefs. They defined their greatest happiness as finding people who accepted their message and joined the Church. Their greatest challenges and disappointments were people who would not listen and people who listened but who would not join. If I forgot basic demographic material as I read the interviews, I could not tell whether the women served in the 1930s or the 1960s just by the stories that they told.

STORY TELLING

Why do all the stories sound the same? Folklorists have asked corresponding questions and come up with some answers. According to Bert Wilson, "As we attempt to pass on knowledge of certain recurring human situations through the spoken word . . . we tend to develop structured narrative patterns, or molds, that give shape and meaning to the stories we tell about these experiences. As a result, narratives recounting all of these events might . . . all tend to sound alike" (155-56).

In other words, as potential missionaries talk to relatives about their missionary experiences and listen to the homecoming addresses of returning missionaries, they develop a missionary pattern in their minds. When they go on their own missions, they have these examples in mind. Then when they return and tell their stories to their families and other Church members, they have models to fit their experiences. And they continue the cycle.

Another reason the missionary stories sound the same is that nearly all of the respondents had positive experiences. The Redd Center interviewees volunteered for the project because they felt that their mission experiences were interesting and they wanted to share them. Years had passed since they had served, so they may have emphasized the positive. As Leo Tolstoy explained in the opening line in *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families are alike but an unhap-

py family is unhappy after its own fashion" (qtd. in Zeitlin 33). The stories in my interviews show that "all happy missionaries are alike." Unfortunately, I do not have examples to show if "unhappy missionaries are unhappy after their own fashion."

The rest of this paper will show the similarities between missionary experiences. Because my time is limited, I will discuss the three experience-groups of knocking on doors, serving in auxiliaries, and working in offices. The stories were selected at random so that I could show that the stories could be interchanged. I made no attempt to carefully pick stories that would illustrate my points.

TRACTING

All of the women discussed their experiences in going door-to-door. Thelma Cropper from Globe, Arizona, went on a mission to the Central States in 1931 and spent the first fifteen months in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She explained, "We'd go tracting from nine to twelve every day, five days a week. We went singly, not together, because there were so few missionaries. . . . It was quite a responsibility to go alone and tract. We wouldn't be able to do that now." The only specific experience she recalled from tracting was meeting a "spiritualist with the table. She was going to convert us. Needless to say, we didn't get very far . . . converting her" (2, 5).

Nancy Tenney Anderson, an Englishwoman, served in her home country right after World War II between 1946 and 1948. She told about knocking on doors in Birmingham, England. "I can remember one week we went tracting and we tracted from dawn to dark. . . . They were long streets, long roads, and little country lanes. It didn't matter where. . . . We would tract to our hearts' delight. [My companion] loved tracting, and I loved tracting. There was an excitement. We would knock on the door, and we wouldn't know who would come to the door." She recalled two reactions when they knocked on doors: people who had lost relatives during the war and who were looking for a faith to hold on to and people who had lost all faith because of the war (3-4).

Wydonna Jeanette Bodily Andersen of Berkeley, California, went to the Australian Mission in 1960. When she first arrived, her companion "took me out tracting straight off even though I had a miserable

cold. To this day that first street is the street that stands out in my mind. The house is vague, and I can't remember the family. We walked in, and Sister Peterson said, 'Okay, Sister, this is your discussion.' We had flannel boards. Anybody can look at pictures and tell a story. I'd heard her do it once. So I did it, and I bore testimony to the investigator that I knew Joseph Smith was a prophet. I was so shocked. It just came out, and I knew! That street was for me. That was where I was converted or finally found out I was converted" (6).

These women's stories about tracting include many common elements. First, it took up a great deal of their time. They recalled specific instances only when they had special experiences such as Andersen's receiving a testimony or Cropper's contacting a spiritualist. There were differing factors such as the shortage of missionaries during the 1930s and the reactions of people following World War II. But generally I could interchange the stories and not be sure when or where the interviewee had served. (By the way, not all interviewees loved tracting!)

All missionaries—elders and sisters—spent countless hours knocking on doors. After the initial novelty wore off, all days started to follow a pattern, and the missionaries did not remember one day in particular unless something unique happened. Just as on many days Mormon Church President and diarist Wilford Woodruff recorded, "Worked on the farm," sister missionaries recalled the routine of tracting each day.

Tracting stories are also a good example of how missionaries fit their experiences to an established mode. Since all missionaries spent at least some time knocking on doors, those were the types of stories that women and men were used to hearing in homecoming talks. They had an idea in their minds of what tracting was like, and they told their narratives, whether consciously or unconsciously, so that they became part of the tracting lore they had already heard.

Tracting stories are also frequently inspirational stories about how the hand of God directed the missionaries. A common story is, "We were going to quit, but we knocked on one last door and got in." When returned missionaries tell these stories to Church members, they help bind the group together, convincing them that God blesses missionaries for

their service. The stories also showed that God blessed those who worked long hours and followed mission rules.

AUXILIARY WORK

Before the Church organized stakes outside Utah, missionaries, like mission presidents, also had to work closely with members. The men and women assumed the same types of responsibilities that they would have had in a regular ward. Elders helped in priesthood positions such as serving as branch presidents; in some areas, men also worked with the auxiliaries, including Relief Society and Primary.

Women frequently organized Primaries to work with member and nonmember children. Edith Scrup Clinger grew up in Salina, Utah, and attended Brigham Young University for two years before she went to the North Central States Mission in 1937. She recalled that organizing Primaries and Relief Societies was an important part of her work. She and her companion spent the morning tracting. "In the afternoon since we had to walk, most of the time would be taken going to and from Primary and teaching Primary. In the evening we made calls. We did some preparation. We did quite a bit of ditto work that we could give to the children to correlate with their Primary lessons." Their landlady told them, "I've had a lot of schoolteachers board at our place but I've never seen any of them go to the work that you have to make these Valentine boxes." Clinger continued, "Maybe we misused our time, but I don't think so. The children needed a good image of the Church. If we did routine work, we read to each other" (11).

Verona Blackham Balle grew up in Carbon County and entered nurses' training in Salt Lake City in 1947. After listening to a Sunday School teacher, she decided that she wanted to serve a mission, and she went to Uruguay in 1952. During the first part of her mission, she recalled organizing Primaries in outlying areas. Later her mission president asked her to start the Mia Maid program for young women in the mission. "The last few months of my mission," she recalled, "Sister Goodwin and I traveled to all of the branches of the mission. We had instructions to work with the Sunday School and all of the organizations. I was to give them instructions on the Mia Maid program and help

them get it set up. It was a real inspiration that six months into my mission, I would be called to work with the young women throughout the mission, as given in my setting apart blessing" (7-8).

Deanne Malmstrom Roberts, who served in Argentina during the 1960s, also worked with the auxiliaries. In one branch she recalled, "We kept working on these Primary nonmember kids. There was a program that the mission used that had something like ten or fifteen lessons. We would take these kids through. If they finished them all, then they could graduate. Then when we contacted their parents, they were more interested in talking to us than if we knocked on their door out of the blue. It was a good proselyting tool." Her mission president's wife worked with the mission Primary. "She had one or two lady missionaries all the time that worked with her in the Primary. They were going around to branches, getting the Primary set up and having leadership meetings with Primary workers" (4, 12).

These sisters who served on missions in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1960s worked with auxiliaries in the same ways. Some organized Primaries on a local level to work with member and nonmember children. They were familiar with auxiliary work because they had participated in Primary and Mutual and watched their mothers preside over and teach in these organizations. They knew the terminology and format for describing these organizations in their home wards, and they used the same methods to tell their mission stories.

OFFICE WORK

Women who served missions during the time period covered by our oral history project frequently worked in the office. Carol Ogden Nuffer, a native of Richfield, served in the Northwestern States Mission during World War II. She recalled, "I was in the mission office for ten months. That was the bulk of my mission. I was the mission recorder. I took care of all the records. I typed all the baptismal certificates for the branch clerks. I sent the records to all the branches and transferred all the records out to Salt Lake City. It was a big job because we were the largest mission in the Church at the time. I did it days and spent many nights also. I enjoyed the work. It was something that I could easily do and that I was prepared to do" (7).

This stereotypical role was not always an arrangement the sister missionary desired. Ruth H. Cardon, a native of Salt Lake City, served in Hawaii in the 1950s. After she had been on her mission for nine months, the mission president asked her to be the secretary in the office. She remembered, "I wasn't a very good typist, and he could type much better than I could. He could take shorthand, and I couldn't do that, and I was always embarrassed typing his letters and having to erase and erase and erase because I just didn't have enough finger control on the typewriter" (2).

Some of those with secretarial training resented being placed in an office. Although the mission president wanted the women in the offices, the missionaries questioned their assignments. Muriel Thole, an English convert, served in her home country in 1952. She recalled: "I started off in the London office. I was an accountant, and I felt there was no difference in keeping the Lord's books than in a furniture showroom. I asked every single morning for a transfer out into the mission field so that I could proselyte. After about three months I was transferred down to Manchester." Later the mission president asked her to come back to the office. Although she preferred proselyting, she reluctantly obeyed her priesthood leader (3).

Jackie Webster Hainsworth grew up in southern Idaho, Philadelphia, and Provo. Just before she turned twenty-one years old, she asked her Provo bishop if she could go on a mission. She went to the Southwest Indian Mission in 1956. Because of the primitive conditions on the reservations, her mission president opposed sending women out in the field and had them work in the office. According to Hainsworth, "They kept me in the mission home as a recorder for three months. My companion was the secretary. She had been there about one year. We badgered the mission president to please give us the opportunity to go out into the mission. Evidently sisters had not been out into the field. They had always worked right in the office. Because I had worked for my dad for so many years, I'd had that experience. I wanted to go out as a missionary" (4). Eventually the president assigned Hainsworth and her companion to work with the Zuni.

I could transfer the stories that these women tell about working in the office from the 1930s to the

1960s because they are so much alike. The work was very similar. Whenever they served, the women spent their time typing records, handling correspondence, and filing.

SUMMARY

The more I read the interviews, the less I seemed to have to write about, because the stories were so similar. I finally concluded that in many ways the interviews tell more about Mormon story-telling than they do about missionary experiences.

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“Untrumpeted and Unseen”: An Introduction to Josephine Spencer, Mormon “Authoress”

Kylie Nielson Turley

In 1979 Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert published *A Believing People*, including in the book a poem and a story by Latter-day Saint author Josephine Spencer.¹ Their book did not single out this woman for any special recognition, but her writings are interesting, especially when compared generally with works of her Mormon contemporaries. Much nineteenth-century literature has been forgotten, seemingly with good reason as far as literary criticism is concerned. In her study of Sarah Elizabeth Carmichael, Miriam B. Murphy notes that Mormon authors of that era “tended to explore religious themes with a dogmatic zeal that no longer appeals to most readers” (53). In “Poetry and Private Lives,” Maureen Ursenbach Beecher concurs with Murphy, suggesting that the poetry written by Mormon women during the nineteenth century is usually “superficial, bland, unimaginative, [and] derived from known forms and themes” (56).

Josephine Spencer’s literature often transcends these stereotypes. She began writing during the nascent years of the Mormon Home Literature movement, and certainly some of her writings are excellent examples of this movement. Yet, to understand this author solely as a “Mormon” is to overlook other—sometimes dominant—characteristics in her literature. Likely her interesting life led her to produce literature with a bit more flair and imagination than her contemporaries. Born in 1861, Josephine Spencer did have some things in common with other Mormon women living in Salt Lake City around the turn of the century. She attended her church meetings, participated in women’s clubs—such as the Utah Women’s Press Club and the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers—and wrote poetry for the *Woman’s Exponent* and other Church

publications. However, unlike many of her peers, Josephine Spencer remained single throughout her life; although she lived with her sister and presumably her sister’s children, she never had children of her own. Moreover, she worked full-time for over twenty years as the society and literary editor for the *Deseret News*. In an era when a slim percentage of Mormon women worked and those who did work were mostly involved in domestic service, Josephine Spencer’s occupation was exceptional. Perhaps she encountered ideas and philosophies at work or perhaps her unmarried status caused her to contemplate unusual issues both popular and personal. In any case, Josephine Spencer’s short stories and poems at times must be understood as something other than Mormon. Sometimes they must be understood as literature written by a woman. At other times they must be understood as socialist literature, or simply as the product of a late nineteenth-century American writer. Her writings are best described when all of these views are considered, that is, when they are seen as a link between Mormon and Marxist, Mormon and American, and Mormon and feminist literature.

A woman socialist in Zion during the late 1800s is a fairly radical idea. Yet consider the following poem published by Josephine Spencer in 1891 in *The Contributor*:

The World’s Way

There are sparkling waves in the sea afloat,
But never a drop to drink;
They will bear up the weight of an iron boat,
But a man’s light form must sink.

So billows of pity splash and swirl
While the homeless beggar starves;

And the state-ship sails with flags afurl,
While the builder dies at the wharves.

Formally, the poem has an iambic rhythm and a meter of four feet followed by three feet. The second line of the first stanza, "But never a drop to drink," could be a succinct literary allusion to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The lovely metaphor "billows of pity" makes it sound as if the ocean waves, or perhaps nature itself, sorrows with the starving beggars—an idea no doubt interesting to modern scholars of ecocriticism. The alliteration of the "s" sounds in the second stanza coupled with the iambic rhythm produce the feel of rolling waves. Interestingly, the alliteration also draws attention to the word "state-ship." "State-ship" seems to imply the wealthy class of a society or the government or "state" of a nation. Either interpretation is representative of a capitalist system that exploits the ship-builders in the poem, and then leaves them to starve at the wharves, alienated from the object of their labor and from themselves.

All in all, "The World's Way" is a pithy little piece of socialist propaganda and not a bad poem either. If it were the only example of socialism evident in Josephine Spencer's writings, it would merely be an exciting aberration. However, as one example of many, these socialist tendencies are fascinating. Josephine Spencer wrote at least three short stories with distinctive Marxist flavor. All three stories were published in the *Contributor* before 1895. In that year, the stories were republished in a book of Spencer's short stories titled *The Senator from Utah and Other Tales of the Wasatch*. In the story from which the book takes its name, Spencer states her socialist ideas quite openly. The Senator, a disreputable fellow from the ruling class, explains the problems that Utah is facing:

Any one . . . coming to Salt Lake at the present time, and moving only in the central and eastern part of the city, would possibly gain no hint of the existence of an element of poverty and discontent. Our Capitol Hill and principal avenues are crowded with palaces, and the distant streets and suburbs with respectable mansions and cottages; but afar at the base of the Oquirrh, and in the canyons about them has grown up a town of tenements and hovels, apart and almost distinct from the city in the eastern part of the valley.

What Chinatown was once to San Francisco, and the Italian quarter to New Orleans, so our "Labortown," as we choose to style it, is to the city of Salt Lake. The only difference is that in this case the entire population is organized into a society pledged to wage incessant and deadly warfare against capital and its class. (25-26)

Although the Senator recognizes the imminent labor crisis, he by no means blames his own class as does one of his aides. The aide argues that "capital" has "[ignored] the lessons taught by the experience of other communities" (24). In Utah, the aide continues, the bourgeoisie has continued "working through the same old selfish principles and methods of monopoly" and has "placed its hand upon the materials of production." Whenever possible, the class has "[riveted] new restrictions upon the rights of labor" (25).

In "The Senator from Utah," the restrictions laid upon the laboring class grow too heavy. Union leaders meet to determine a strategy. However, capitalists already have a plan: reacting against rumors of labor violence, they try to murder the union leaders. Although the conclusion ends romantically when some young capitalists-turned-socialists save the day, the Marxist elements of the story are difficult to ignore. The characters consistently refer to "capital" and its inherent repressiveness; class warfare is the plot of the story; and the capitalists' plan to kill the labor union leaders is thwarted. "The Senator from Utah" is certainly not the typical story written by a young nineteenth-century Mormon woman.

Nevertheless, Josephine Spencer wrote many stories that are appropriately termed Mormon Home Literature. They are didactic; the lessons they mean to teach are always obvious. Yet the stories by this woman are often not so heavy-handed as some Latter-day Saint literature. "Jeddie Holt's Reward" is one example of Josephine Spencer's contributions to early Mormon journals. Though published in the *Contributor*, the story is well described by the editor of the *Young Woman's Journal*, who claimed that stories ought "to please while [they] teach important lessons, to implant solid principles of truth and nobility while chaining the minds and attentions with . . . seemingly 'light literature'" (96).

In Josephine Spencer's story, Jeddie Holt, a

young crippled boy who lives with his apostate aunt and uncle, works night and day for a year and a half to earn enough money to attend the 1893 Salt Lake Temple dedication. Just when he has enough money, his cousin—an altogether disagreeable boy—breaks his leg and requires an immediate operation. Despite the unkind attitudes and actions of his cousin, his aunt, and his uncle, Jeddie gives them his temple money. He is distraught that he cannot attend the dedication, but he is—of course—rewarded for his charitable act: the bishop lends him enough money to attend the dedication anyway. The title refers to Jeddie Holt's *reward*, but perhaps it ought to refer to Jeddie's *rewards* because Jeddie's crippled legs are miraculously healed the moment he goes into the temple. Moreover, his apostate aunt returns to the Church after witnessing his charity and the subsequent miracle.

"Jeddie Holt's Reward" is a Mormon story replete with bishops, temple dedications, and gossipy small Utah towns. However, it would be a mistake to assume that prayers, charitable acts, miraculous healings, and heavenly rewards existed only in early Mormon literature. Didacticism was nothing new for America, although Latter-day Saints in late nineteenth-century Utah were barely beginning to practice a genre that was quickly dying in the rest of the United States. Pious and didactic stories had been part of the American literary scene at least as early as the 1820s (MacLeod) whereas Mormon didactic fiction is usually dated to Orson F. Whitney's 1888 speech "Home Literature." The stories written by other American authors are actually quite similar in tone and style to the stories later produced by Mormons; moralistic stories for children (and adults) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and numerous others were certainly no less *religious* than Josephine Spencer's fiction even though they didn't rely on cultural symbols like the temple. Though it is tempting to either embrace or renounce Home Literature solely on the basis of its Mormonness, such an action misses the historical context of the works. The literature actually fits quite nicely into broader American literary trends of the nineteenth century. Mormons were about fifty years late, but perhaps the historical gap makes sense considering the Mormon hiatus from fiction and their isolation in Utah for

several decades.

Many modern critics scoff at the simplicity of all didactic stories—Mormon, American, or otherwise—and brand them as unworthy of scholarly attention. Jane Tompkins persuasively argues that the pejorative labels of childish, unsophisticated, and overstated have been applied to didactic literature only in the last fifty years, while earlier this genre was held in high regard (186–201). Many methods of modern literary criticism call for subtlety, depth, and realism—qualities that are difficult to uncover in blatantly didactic literature whose very purpose is to teach obvious moral lessons. Somehow it doesn't seem quite adequate or quite fair to judge this literature on qualities that it never tried to possess, indeed, qualities that it actively avoided.

Ironically, feminists—not Mormons—have done the most to restore value to the conservative, faithful literature of the 1800s. Scholars such as Nina Baym, Joanne Dobson, Susan Harris, and Jane Tompkins question the standards of traditional critical methods because they seem to discriminate categorically against women and against works by women.² Thus, as a genre, nineteenth-century didactic literature is never found praiseworthy because it was largely—almost exclusively—written by women. In "Sentimental Power," Jane Tompkins argues that the grounds used to dismiss sentimental novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seem to be "universal standards of aesthetic judgment," yet are, in reality, merely those grounds that were "established in a struggle to supplant the tradition of evangelical piety and moral commitment" (82). The literary critics of this century "have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority" (82). To remedy this situation, Tompkins suggests that readers of didactic literature

set aside some familiar categories for evaluating fiction—stylistic intricacy, psychological subtlety, epistemological complexity—and [see] the sentimental novel, not as an artifice of eternity answerable to certain formal criteria and to certain psychological and philosophical concerns, but as a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory. (84–85).

Tompkins's insights are aimed at religious moralist literature and can easily be applied to Mormon Home Literature like Josephine Spencer's. Her theories help us understand that "Jeddie Holt's Reward," is written in the tradition of typological narratives—that is, narratives based on theological types. In Tompkins's words, this story is a narrative "aimed at demonstrating that human history is a continual reenactment of the sacred drama of redemption" (91). Jeddie Holt is not a complex character because he is not supposed to be. He is a type, a Christ-character whose actions bring his aunt back into the fold of the Good Shepherd. As modern readers, we may be uncomfortable with the story because we know what's going to happen; there is never any doubt that Jeddie will do the "right" thing and that his sacrifice will be rewarded. Literary critics of today consider this foreknowledge to be a flaw. Nevertheless, a typological narrative is, by definition, based on the sacrifice-salvation scenario. Readers are *supposed* to know what will happen in the story; "Jeddie Holt's Reward" like the other typological narratives, is a reaffirmation of readers' faith and a retelling of the Plan they already know.

Some may be uncomfortable with my application of feminist theories to Mormon literature. However, in the case of Josephine Spencer such a linking is not out of place. An inchoate feminism not fully formed in much of her literature matures in her last story, "Little Mother." Published in the *Relief Society Magazine* only five months before her death at age sixty-seven in October 1928, "Little Mother" is a dramatic rewrite of a story written eighteen years earlier. The story details tiny episodes in a boy's life as he grows to manhood, noting especially how his relationship with his mother changes and deteriorates until his mother finally sacrifices herself and the relationship in order to save her son's marriage.

Unlike the first version of the story in which the characters had names ("Bertha," "Hal," and "Bob"), this version relies on titles for names: "Little Mother," "Big Man," and "Boy." Obviously, *Little Mother* is in opposition to *Big Man*, signifying the husband's perhaps unintentional but very real lack of respect for his wife. The titles work to make the story generic; this could be any family with a Little Mother, Big Man, and Boy, or, perhaps, it is *every* family.

The story begins with the birth of Boy. Big Man "gloats" and claims it's "wonderful luck" that the child is a boy, because "There always will be something to do, planning for him. With a girl it's different—her future is more or less a certainty, if she's a real, true girl" (238). Big Man gleefully begins thinking of the "thousand chances—careers galore, with rungs leading to the top of the ladder" that will be available to his son. Yet Little Mother merely snuggles with her baby and says "the words over softly, hungrily, 'Mine to keep.'" The rest of the story works to invalidate Little Mother's love for her son and her efforts "to keep" him.

For example, when the Boy receives a diplomatic appointment in Europe, he and Big Man congratulate each other. Big Man "gurgles" in "joy and triumph." He tells his son, "It has come *our* way, after all the other fellows' scraping and wire pulling" (241; emphasis mine). Boy replies, "And I don't forget I owe it to you." Josephine Spencer comments on the behavior of the two in the short, choppy style of the story: "[Big Man and Boy] gloated for a long time. Men-fashion, their talk larded with technical expressions, suppressed egotism and large outlook." Neither man notices that Little Mother is not participating in their jubilation. She "[tries] to manage a smile, but [does] nothing more than to straighten out the pitiful droop in the corners of her mouth." Upset that she is going to lose her newly matriculated son for another four years, Little Mother nevertheless tries to be happy for him: "It's certainly fine—your getting the position . . . [though] I'm not at all surprised." Perhaps not understanding or even perceiving his mother's reasons for being somber, Boy merely "[crosses] to her and [gives] her a bearish hug," saying, "You've always been a brick, Little Mother." Boy has learned from his father to expect the "Little" mother to sacrifice for his wants and desires. He loves his mother, but his love is always predicated upon a mother who loves him more.

Years pass and Little Mother continually swallows her tears in order to give the men what they want. Even on his deathbed, Big Man asks her to sacrifice. He tells Little Mother that he's "thought it over and over—and always with the one answer—that it is cruel, inhuman, to ask you to meet [my death] alone" (243). Yet then the man proceeds to ask Little

Mother to face his death without the moral support of her son. Years later, when her son returns from Europe, Little Mother continues sacrificing for these one-sided familial relationships. All the "little tasks whose dullness and routine had spelled distaste in her listless misery, under the Boy's show of interest began to seem important. Nothing was too minute for his appreciative notice." The woman is starved for genuine love, yet never receives it from those who should love her most.

Finally Boy marries. His unreasonable wife demands that he stop making his weekly trip to the other side of town to visit his mother. Boy, like his father, makes a small show of recognizing the needs of Little Mother. He tells Little Mother, "[It doesn't] seem just to me, and never will, to sacrifice you absolutely to our own selfish ease and happiness. As if I could be happy with you deliberately put out of my life" (248). So, perhaps less deliberately, but with the same result, he places Little Mother in a situation such that she feels she must sacrifice once again. This time she agrees to move to a tiny farm, "miles from the railroad and the nearest neighbor" (250). Isolated on the farm except for a few hired hands who dislike her, Little Mother contemplates what will become of her life. Certainly her grandchildren will never know her. Eventually even Boy will, "if not [forget], at least not [miss] her." After all, "time and custom wipe out many things." Years of sacrificing for others have rewarded Little Mother with loneliness and pain. She has been deserted. At this lowest point in her life, Little Mother receives a telegram informing her that Boy has died. It is the "last blow . . . that [can] wring [her] heart." She weeps:

There [is] no God after all. A Being supreme in knowledge and power and mercy would have spared her this anguish. He would have taken her life—so wretched and useless . . . *Boy dead!* It was a thing absolutely monstrous—unholy! For the first time in her life Little Mother's lips began to frame something almost blasphemous. (251).

At this moment, Little Mother wakes to realize that she has been dreaming. The birth of her son has made her feverish, and she has had a nightmare.

Interestingly, the two versions of the story end very differently. In the first version of the story,

Little Mother, resigned herself to her fate, says, "Let me kiss [the child]. . . . Let me hold, and cherish, and keep him fast—while I may" ("To Keep" 225). As in "Little Mother," Bertha makes an independent decision to sacrifice herself for her son. She is rewarded for this decision when she awakes and discovers that her son is still a baby. Nevertheless, Bertha has "learned" from her nightmare that her son is not truly her own, that her bad dream will inevitably occur. Her statements demonstrate that she is willing to change herself, to change her need and desire to love her son wholeheartedly, so that she will not become the pitiful, embittered woman of her dream. The after-the-dream Bertha will "hold and cherish" her son while she can; then she will turn humbly away while he succeeds in a world she can never enter.

In the second version of the story, Little Mother exclaims "quite wildly, clasping the Boy hungrily to her heart, 'He is mine—I tell you—I have gone down to the gate of death to gain him. He is mine—to keep'" ("Little Mother" 251). Whether Little Mother is claiming the right to alter her dream and literally keep her son or whether she is denying the inevitable reality of her nightmare is difficult to determine. In either case, what is not debatable is that Little Mother has become a stronger woman by seeing what she will become if she allows herself to be trampled underfoot by the men in her life. This is an enlightened woman with needs of her own, not the "little mother" readers met when the story began. She is not the same woman whose husband can command her to "confess" that she's happy her child is a boy rather than a girl. It is possible that this new woman will refuse to suffer alone and in silence when her husband asks her to face his death alone. Indeed, this woman may be strong enough to ask her husband and son to love her in return for her constant, ubiquitous love. The woman in "Little Mother" cannot allow herself to relive her dream because its heretic consequences are too devastating. Certainly, the unbearable life may still follow, but it will not be because Little Mother surrendered.

"Little Mother" is an intriguing story as far as Mormon literature is concerned. Obviously it is a far cry from the didacticism of "Jeddie Holt's Reward." Little Mother's sacrifices are rewarded only with

more difficult and emotionally wrenching opportunities to sacrifice. Unlike a stereotypical character in a Home Literature story, Little Mother denies God's existence and comes a breath away from cursing him. Jeddie Holt's actions renew his faith in God and draw others into the fold. Little Mother's selfless actions, rather than bringing those around her closer to God, actually allow them to wallow in their selfishness, and their selfishness ultimately drives them away from her. Readers can appropriately wonder whether Little Mother's life after her nightmare will include her past faith in God, charity, and prayer. The label "Mormon Home Literature" in its moralist, sentimental sense does not fit this story.

Thus, Josephine Spencer's poetry and short stories transcend any single, tidy classification, requiring instead a more sophisticated and involved analysis. The majority of her works are "Mormon" and didactic, yet these characteristics do not exclude them from being socialist or feminist or, broadly, American. Doubtless, other labels could describe aspects of these works as well. My resistance to applying one overarching label to Josephine Spencer and her literature is not sloppy or careless scholarship. Rather, I wish to demonstrate her complexity.

Spencer's last published poem symbolizes the complexity I see in her works.

Etched

The horizon a hazy line;
 Foreground, a patch of crusted brine;
 Buff beach, brown shore, a waveless sea—
 With noon sun burning all the three.
 South edge of serrate, Vandyke peaks;
 Pale island headlands laid in streaks
 Against the west; a northern shore
 Set dark against the lake's blue floor.
 Dun prairies laid along the east
 With dingy clumps of sage-brush creased;
 And still, white ponds of alkali;
 A splash of green, a cool stream rolled
 Through wheatfields beaded thick with gold;—
 And then a city, lifting high,
 Thin, pointed spires against the sky.

This poem was sent from California, where Josephine Spencer lived for the last six years of her life, to the Eliza Roxey [sic] Snow Poetry Contest in the *Relief Society Magazine*. Her address demonstrates the author's displacement from her own culture; she

understood it well and participated in it through her writing, but she never quite fit the norm in lifestyle or literature. Most of her literature is properly placed alongside the writings of Nephi Anderson, Susa Young Gates, and many other early Mormon literati because it is essentially Mormon, sentimental, and moralist, however advanced in style and intricacy. The "thin, pointed spires against the sky" suggest the Salt Lake Temple, a fitting representation of this Mormon aspect in Josephine Spencer's works. Yet the Mormon scene depicted in the poem is not the only view. There seems to be an unconscious "I" in the poem, a narrator who looks to all sides of her and records what she sees. This was Josephine Spencer's role: to document the panorama found on all sides of her, recording views that often seem diverse if not contradictory. Her writings are the solid evidence of subtle socialism and feminism in turn-of-the-century Utah. The many-sided setting of "Etched" is symbolic of an intricate Salt Lake City Mormon society and the multifaceted writings of a woman who lived in that society. Unfortunately it is the author who has been forgotten. Like the women in a poem she wrote, Josephine Spencer has been "untrumpeted and unseen"³ for far too long.

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NOTES

1. For more information on Josephine Spencer and her literature, see my *The Life and Literature of Josephine Spencer*, M.A. thesis, Brigham Young U, 1995.

2. See, for example, Joanne Dobson, "The American Renaissance Reenvisioned," *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1993), 164-82; Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter, 63-81 (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978); Susan K. Harris, *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); and Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

3. The title comes from Josephine Spencer's poem "Recognition," *Young Woman's Journal* 4 (August 1893): 490-91.

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Telling It Slant: Literary Silences and Authenticity in Adolescent Literature

Patricia Truxler Coleman

The writer of literature for young adults faces special problems with the literary establishment. He or she is likely to be regarded by peers as a writer of lesser worth (*surely it must be easier to write for and about young people*), to be regarded as writing for an audience of lesser sophistication (*surely young readers can have no notion of literary merit in any work they read*), and to be regarded as dealing with simplistic situations, conflicts, and themes (*surely the life of a young person is ever so much simpler and more orderly than that of an adult*). Mark Twain, Louisa May Alcott, Robert Frost, and Charles Dickens aside, the writer of fiction for young adults is bound to be seen by his or her community as employing a simpler technique on a simpler range of subjects than is the writer for adults.

This is, of course, not the case. While courses in literature for children and adolescents at major universities across the English-speaking world continue to be dismissed by the *avant garde* as "kiddy lit," anyone who has ever taught young people, anyone who has ever himself been a young reader, and anyone who has respect for the child must understand that literature for and about adolescents is *at least* as important as adult literature. For where do adult readers come from but children? And where do careful, critical adult readers come from? You may be tempted to answer "from my classes, of course," but the fact is—and the research certainly documents this—that those of us who read as adults read and were read to as children. And those of us who choose to pursue a career sharing our passion for literature with our students were lucky enough to have stumbled—either accidentally or with the help of a great teacher—on great writers.

But if, throughout the English-speaking world, those who dedicate themselves to composition for the

young are disparaged, those in the Mormon establishment face even more difficulties, especially if that writer happens to be a Mormon woman. After all, this writer would have to face all the problems that her peers elsewhere face. That should be hard enough. But she would also have to face two other problems: being a Mormon and being a woman. For better or worse, the Mormon woman writer is plagued by social expectations, both because she is a woman and because she is a Mormon. And for someone like Ann Edwards Cannon this cannot be easy.

Cannon herself has confessed to being concerned in writing for the broad adolescent American audience of "putting Mormons in a bad light" (Interview, 9 Jan. 1996). She has likewise admitted that much of the motivation for publishing under the name A. E. Cannon was to distance herself from the inevitable expectations that might come with being identified as either LaVell's daughter or a woman.

Because, like all writers, she is at her best dealing with the people and places most familiar to her, her material is, naturally, Mormon. Because her material is Mormon, her audience will likely include Mormons. This follows because young readers, like adults, enjoy reading about people like themselves. Because her audience is likely to include Mormons, she must be very careful about how she handles material that is especially culturally sensitive. This follows because she cannot reach an audience who is, for one reason or another, alienated from her work. Because she is a Mormon who also happens to be a woman, she must be cautious about how and what she says. Cannon has said that she prefers to think of Mormonism in her work as metaphor, acknowledging that she uses Mormonism the way Catholic writers use Catholicism, not as an opportunity for

theological discourse but as a vehicle for exploring the human condition (Interview, 3 Jan. 1996).

Like so many other Mormon women writers—indeed, women writers in general—Ann Edwards Cannon has learned to address culturally sensitive material through what I have come to call “the silences.” Women writers, in America and England at least, have been especially good at this. Where a man might have the opportunity to think and speak as he pleases simply because men have traditionally been credited with having a broader range of vocabulary (a not, in my opinion, altogether good thing), a woman—for better or worse—has to learn to communicate *through* the silences, using what is *not* said as an opportunity to speak, to an audience of young people, themselves already used to keeping silent. In one case in particular, Cannon admits to a special kind of silence. Once, when she was accused of having her characters swear a great deal, she countered with the observation that kids of the age she writes about *do* swear a lot. But she also observed, as any careful reader can attest to, that she almost never actually records the swearing of her characters, but instead uses narrative intrusions such as “and then he swore.” As she points out, this serves a multitude of purposes: it keeps her novels from being banned anywhere but Texas (something she has her eye on, for promotional purposes); it allows the audience to fill in whatever would be appropriate; and it doesn’t tamper with the texture of the book (Interview, 9 Jan. 1996). In this case, Cannon uses silences in order to speak, something that any articulate woman understands. That is to say, if she were to record the actual speech of young people, she may well find her books banned in other places than Texas, and if she finds her books banned, then she never will have spoken to her readers. When I reminded her that the surest way to get a book read was to ban it (I’m thinking of calling for a ban on adolescent reading of Shakespeare), she reminded me that, for the most part, the *parent* buys the book for the child. So much for my plan.

I cannot say enough good things about Ann Cannon’s three novels. *Cal Cameron by Day—Spider-Man by Night* (1988), *The Shadow Brothers* (1990), and *Amazing Gracie* (1991) all exhibit the marks of a sensitive, born storyteller. Her humor, which we have been treated to at AML meetings in

the past (I personally will never forget her “the part about the soup isn’t true” story or her description of “that monument to jello architecture—rainbow jello”) is abundant in all three of these novels. Here again she uses silences: any astute reader knows that much of the power of humor is derived from its capacity to speak both literally and metaphorically at the same time.

Her capacity to capture the idiom of teenagers is engaging for both young and adult readers alike. When Gracie’s stepfather-to-be shows up with a perfectly awful dress for her to wear to the wedding, you can hear the “Anything-But-Mervyn’s-I’ve-Got-To-Have-Laura-Ashley-Like-Duh” mentality of even the nicest and most generously minded teenage girl clicking away. When one of the Shadow brothers talks the other into buying a hearse, he points out to his brother that this would be the perfect way to get girls’ attentions. I could not help thinking that Henry would make the ideal T. S. Eliot scholar later in life. Henry and Eliot have in common the notion that in a world of fugitives, the person taking the opposite direction may appear to be the one running away. Henry’s thinking is typically teenage: take the opposite path; it’s the only way to get where you are going anyway and do what you want to be doing *and* at the same time annoy an adult.

Cannon’s ability to spin a captivating tale that keeps her audience reading and rereading is evident. In my case, the rereading occurred on a transatlantic flight this past Christmas day. By the time we had landed in Atlanta, I had demolished *Cal Cameron*. Before we boarded the plane for London, I was halfway through *The Shadow Brothers*. When they brought us dinner on the plane, I was annoyed because I hadn’t gotten more than a chapter into *Amazing Gracie*, and I was already rehooked. And by this point, my husband, whose idea of great transoceanic reading is the *International Herald Tribune*, was miffed because I was having more fun than he was.

And truly I was—having more fun, that is. On every page, in every situation I found humor. And that is quite a compliment when you consider that Cannon deals with everything from adolescent accusations of lesbianism to suicidal mothers and rich, racist Mormons. I recalled how my children had loved her books when they were younger. I recalled

what comfort they got from the discovery that even Mormon households have their quirky weirdos and genuinely problematic parent-child relationships, when they discovered that even Cal Cameron, "high school quarterback and all-around hotshot," had problems with his friends. I understood. I recalled what comfort I took as an adult reader in her novels when I discovered the same things. I recalled what comfort I took as the mother of three teenage girls when I learned that my children weren't behaving the way they were because of anything genetic or Catholic, that even well-bred Mormon kids were irritating, that even well-bred Mormon kids prided themselves on being irritating.

But it wasn't only the humor that drew me to Ann Cannon. It was the realism combined with the artistry. In her earliest novel, *Cal Cameron*, Cannon deals with an "all-around hotshot" who, in a first person narrative, reveals that he is afraid of "a crazy old guy who lives in our town named Quentin Q. Payne. Seriously. Mr. Payne is about sixty years old, and he spends his days wandering around town, smoking and mumbling to himself. You probably have at least one guy like this where you live too" (1). No kidding, Cal. In my neighborhood, except for the smoking part, there's at least one of these in every house. They call her the mother. It turns out that Cal is afraid of Mr. Payne because, when he wonders what Mr. Payne was like before he got to be an old mumbler, it occurs to Cal that Mr. Payne was probably pretty much like Cal is now. Now for a kid, that's worrisome. I remember the time my youngest daughter, Amanda, and I were riding in the car and listening to classical music. She asked me if I had always liked classical music. I said no. She said she was afraid of that. Then she asked me what I listened to when I was her age. I told her I listened to what all the other teenagers listened to. All she said was, "I was afraid of that, too. You really know how to make a kid feel good." Suddenly, I realized that Amanda was afraid of turning out just like her mom. All things considered, she could do worse.

Cal, like most of his audience, finds himself a stranger in a strange land. He is, after all, a teenager, and we all know how strange that is. But he is also terribly popular at school, and like most popular people he has to do some pretty nasty things to stay popular. But Cal draws the line at Marti. He will

not make fun of her. He will not ignore her. He will not go along with the plan to make her feel truly alone: Cal Cameron *will not* call her a lesbian, and he won't allow other people to do that either.

Here is where the "talking through the silences" comes in again. It is problematic enough to raise the issue of lesbianism in a novel for young adults, but it is surely even more problematic if you are a Mormon and a woman. Cannon handles the situation with aplomb. It is in what she doesn't say—what Cal doesn't say—that we come to understand that Cannon is raising a serious issue for young people. Questions about their sexuality are explorations into sensitive territory. Questions about lesbianism in today's world are explorations into sensitive territory. Questions about name-calling, whether it's "nigger" or "lesbian," are sensitive. Without addressing the issue of where these accusations came from, without parading Marti's heterosexuality in front of the reader as a moral lesson, without heavy-handed indictment of the name-callers, Cannon carefully navigates us through a difficult channel to a startling insight: that even people like Cal Cameron can feel like strangers in their own hometown.

But if Cal Cameron feels like a stranger in his own hometown, both Gracie (*Amazing Gracie*) and Henry (*The Shadow Brothers*) find themselves strangers in their own homes. Gracie, who's an absolutely delightful young person, is also terribly touching. Surely no child has had it so tough. Gracie's father is dead, her family is poor, her stepfather-to-be is weird, and her mother is clinically depressed and, in fact, suicidal. But Gracie moves with grace through all of this. Here we have a child who could rage against the injustice of it all. She could abandon God, but that never occurs to her. Here we have a child who could come to hate herself, her mother, her stepfather, her friends, or God. But Gracie doesn't; instead, she triumphs.

Like her creator, Gracie's triumphs are mostly through silences. In what Gracie *doesn't* say to her stepfather about the dress, we discover the poignancy and bitter-sweet pain of social accommodation. We also discover the price: Gracie's best friend makes fun of her in that dress at the wedding. In what Gracie *doesn't* say to her stepbrother or her stepfather or her mother, we witness the awkward maturation of all adolescents who are simultaneously swans and

buffoons in the ballet of life and who, as we are inclined to forget, have to learn how to do the right thing for the right reason. But mostly in what Gracie *doesn't* say to herself, we come to know what it takes to move from adolescence to adulthood: the capacity to recognize that we are all of us strangers in the world—in our hometowns, in our homes, even in our own rooms—from time to time.

Cannon's *The Shadow Brothers* is likewise funny, poignant, and insightful. From the first page, where we learn that Henry and Marcus have bought a hearse in order to impress girls, we are hooked. Henry is Navajo. Marcus is Anglo. But they are being raised together in Marcus's family home, as brothers and friends. What Marcus doesn't know is that Henry feels like an outsider. In fact, Marcus thinks Henry has it made.

Let me explain. Henry is Henry Yazzie, my Navajo foster brother. We're the same age, and he's lived with my family . . . since he was seven years old. Henry is one of the smartest guys you'll ever meet, but he isn't weird about how brilliant he is. He isn't the kind of guy, for example, who would ever spend time swapping SAT scores with you or trying to access the school district's records with his personal computer. Henry likes regular stuff like hanging around, looking at girls, watching sports on TV. Did I also mention that he runs? Henry is one of the best high-school runners in the entire state of Utah. (2-3)

So far so good. But, from Marcus's point of view there is just one little problem. "There is one thing a little different about him, though. He writes poems" (3).

While we may find what is being said here remarkable—that a Navajo boy in high school is writing poems—what is even more remarkable is what *is not* being said—that Marcus doesn't find it at all hard to think of a foster brother and a Navajo as not merely an equal but an idol. Even more remarkable is that Henry, as grateful as he is for the opportunities he has had, understands that it isn't always an opportunity to be able to forget who and what you are and where you came from. What isn't said is that *we* are racists—or at least I was as I read the book. Neither Marcus nor the audience can figure out what is eating Henry.

What more could Henry possibly want? How

much luckier could someone from the reservation get? Well, let's see. He could be lucky enough not to have to be separated from his father in order to enjoy the advantages of Christian civilization. He could be lucky enough to have been born into a world where Navajo culture truly was valued. He could have been lucky enough to have been born into a country where reservations hadn't been deemed necessary. And he could be lucky enough to have been bred in a society that appreciated the heritage search of minorities as much as it did of Mormons.

As Ann Cannon has said, being a woman writing for young people has a kind of Emily Dickinson quality about it: you must "tell the truth but tell it slant." Cannon has beautifully and poignantly captured the experience of youth: the sense of isolation, struggle, search for a social code, and longing for a Fitzgeraldian universe where "the world is in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever." Cannon knows that this search of youth brings us all to a crashing yet hopeful realization that that's what being an adult is all about. That and the fact that all of us will, from time to time, be strangers even to ourselves. As Judith Viorst puts it to her character Alexander, who wants to run away to Australia to avoid having a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day, "Some days are like that, even in Australia."

So what is a paper about a woman who writes for an adolescent audience doing at meeting of great big grown-ups like us? Well, I hope to encourage us to do a couple of things: (1) Rethink our attitudes toward literature for young people and toward those who write it (let's stop thinking of them as writers of lesser worth), and (2) Read—or reread—Ann Cannon's novels. If we do this, we might enjoy the consequences: respect for the young person's world and problems in it, respect for the writer for the young person, and comfort, the kind that can only come from realizing that that annoying teenager in your home—you know, the one who says, after you've just brought home \$200 worth of groceries, "There's nothing to eat in this house"—is absolutely normal and a really decent person when you aren't around.

As I was finishing this paper, I had the opportunity to talk with Ann. She was sorry to have to

miss the conference today; but wifely obligations, which I suspect she very much enjoys, have taken her out of town. I told her that there were bound to be questions about when the next book is coming out and what it will be about. She said to tell you this: After the birth of her fifth child she went into a sort of literary coma and doesn't plan to fully recover from it until after mid-life crisis. She even has her children trained to recognize the symptoms. When her youngest son answered the phone at 3:30 the afternoon that I called, he told me that he didn't "know when Mommy would be home. Maybe not for a really, really long time. I think about 4:00."

However, she did assure me that she has two picture books coming out this year. Now that doesn't sound to me like a woman in a literary coma.

PATRICIA TRUXLER COLEMAN, who has been the far-from-token Gentile member of the Association for Mormon Letters for the past ten years, is Professor of English at Westminster College, where she has taught for the past twenty-six years. Her teaching, research, and publication interests include Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, children's literature, American regional women writers, and Utah writers. Her interest in Mormon writers is fueled by her near-preoccupation with religion and place as metaphor and by her fascination with the serious aspects of humor. The mother of three daughters and three stepsons, she calls herself semi-retired, as she has only one daughter at home. She and her husband, Bob, use this "retirement" to escape to Great Britain every chance they get. This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 13 January 1996, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

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The Perry Scheme of Cognitive and Ethical Growth Applied to Levi Peterson's "Canyons of Grace"

Veda Tebbs Hale

I first encountered the Perry Scheme of Cognitive and Ethical Growth in a Shakespeare class offered in St. George by satellite as part of Utah State University's distance learning program. The teacher, David Arnett, challenged us to use the scheme to see where Shakespearean characters were in their cognitive and ethical development. I found it a profoundly useful exercise, helping me to observe simple and complex characteristics of literary figures that gave insight into the quality of the literary work.

Briefly, Perry breaks human cognitive and ethical growth into nine categories: three main (dualism, multiplicity, and relativism), three modifications, and three transitional. (See Appendix for more detailed discussion.)

In the first cognitive position, dualism, a person thinks of the world in opposites. Black or white. Good or bad. He believes it is knowable and that, if he can get enough knowledge and power, he can control it. He isn't happy having to face ideas that might force him out of his simple Garden of Eden and is even capable of devising elaborate rebuttals in an effort to stay there. When he has failed enough times, he finally starts to accept multiplicity, the second main category. However, he still thinks there are experts who have sorted it all out. "When I've knocked enough, when I'm humble enough, or when I prove myself in just the right way, then I'll be let in on their knowledge," he thinks. Often he goes on in life, putting off the effort, feeling somewhat comforted to think that all he has to do is get around to doing it, which he will one of these days.

As multiplicities pile up, first he acknowledges how hard it is to find truth, but he thinks authorities will still have the answers when they get through analyzing all the facts. More disillusionment follows; and finally he has to face the fact there aren't going to be any definitive answers—and therefore no auth-

orities. Often the vulnerability he begins to feel devastates him. He needs support from understanding mentors. If he doesn't get it, he might become addicted to something that eases the existential pain—a substance, sex, or a religious idea. He might retreat and look for signs that tell him what to do.

For example, Dagwood, when a rake falls in front of him, interprets it as a sign to do garden work; then, when he finds his old number-two golf club among his garden tools, interprets it as a sign that he should go golfing. Sometimes someone like the Reuben Millring in Levi Peterson's story "The Canyons of Grace" develops an illusion that he has received signs of divine favor that reinforce his sense of being chosen to put the world right, which usually means putting it back to a simple Garden-of-Eden state. With certain talents, they attract followers. All too often, these individuals also want to retreat from a world that does not give them the assurances they crave—that they are "saved," that they are among the elect.

Another positional characteristic here can be bitterness and cynicism; the individual takes advantage of every opportunity to get what he wants regardless of consequences.

Yet another and less negative stance within this position is that of psychological regression: the person chooses to shut out conflicting information, retreat, and let the opinions of familiar and beloved authority figures suffice for him. If he is lucky, if his accepted authorities are coming from a tried-and-tested tradition that is largely functional, and if he sincerely tries to do what they say, he usually experiences a stable, even happy, life in which he is free to turn much of his attention to sports, hobbies, or making money. He can become angry when anyone shakes this position. He is living on borrowed light.

However, if our pilgrim isn't content to stop

here, the next stage is one in which he accepts that there are many circumstances that affect answers and many intelligent, good people with different answers. Then our searcher must go back to his own reasoning and learn to judge the quality of each possibility. He begins to examine an issue in complex terms, weighing more than one factor in trying to develop an opinion. He decides, except, perhaps in the areas of the hard sciences, that his opinion is as good as anyone's. Even in the hard sciences, he starts to see that the rules are good only as long as a better, more probable theory doesn't come along. In physics he is introduced to the idea that one's expectation affects the outcome. Realizing this interface between personality and objective reality, he sees that he can't depend on anyone else to tell him about his reality. Without a community of support, he may decide that life is hard, impersonal, and cruel—that he is a lone consciousness facing death and extinction. Our pilgrim is now in danger of freezing into a hard-shelled skeptic. He might say something like "What the heck! Anything goes! Whatever strikes my fancy is my truth for the moment."

Cognitive development has now moved to the third main position, relativism. Sometimes, as in any of the transitions between stages, a lethal depression sets in, for, as Perry says, "It takes time for the guts to catch up with leaps of mind" (80).

But suppose our pilgrim continues to progress. The next step is still a relative one, but it isn't an anything-goes one. It is a position Perry calls "Commitment within Relativity." With some humor, the pilgrim now recognizes and tolerates the irony and paradoxes in life. Instead of responding to contradictions with anger, he will just shrug and say, "Oh well, that's life." He values quality over quantity and selects, judges, and builds, having discarded obedience in favor of his own agency. He can take opposites, hold them in tension, and transcend them. No symbol is absolute. He can acknowledge the time-place relativity of them all. He realizes that he needs a community, that strength, intimacy, and identity come through shared vulnerability. He isn't merely tolerant. He is now able to live *without* trying to change people or engaging in such philosophies as "separate but equal" or "live and let live." Instead he accepts others where they are in their development in a way that embraces their viewpoints with compas-

sion. Perry never uses the overworked word "love," just as he doesn't use the word "faith." But, he says, one realizes and incorporates into one's life interactions with people in a way that brings the same results that loving and faith do—strength, intimacy, and identity.

Perry further describes the maturing pilgrim at this stage as a person whose reality is made by his commitments, because what he accepts and acts on pulls a focus out of the relativistic world, thus creating circumstance and environment. However, although this description sounds as if reality is still only a relative stance and not ultimate truth, remember we have left ultimate truth back there in the dualistic garden, perhaps in the keeping of the cherubim with the flaming sword where the Lord must have wanted it. The commitments now are made with one's cognitive ability highly developed—eyes wide open, so to speak—using one's personal authority in judging and building from information gained. He is mining a large field instead of plowing a narrow rut.

In other words, the pilgrim has stopped being concerned about "ultimate truth" and instead concentrates on "provisional ultimacy," as Perry calls it—a commitment with provisions for "further light and knowledge" but, in the meantime, ultimate.

This category of provisional ultimacy is an aspect about this cognitive stage that is hard to understand. Is Perry really describing wholehearted commitment with the back door still open? That's about right. But it isn't as wishy-washy as it sounds. Our pilgrim knows full well he will have times of doubt and tension, but it is natural—just part of the way life is. At times he might appear to be submitting to some outside authority, guru, or hero to avoid making further decisions for himself; but in this cognitive position of commitment within relativism, his real achievement, when he appears to be following some authority, is that he is trying to emulate the courage to dare to make and keep commitments, not necessarily to replicate the commitments themselves.

Another important insight of this pilgrim is the knowledge that he will revert from time to time to earlier stages of thinking and that he will have to start over again and again. He accepts this recycling through earlier positions but hopes and believes he will be somewhat wiser each time. He has the ability

to see irony and humor in his times of retreating.

This isn't an easy scheme to absorb in just a few minutes. Particularly it's hard to really understand this last stage. I guess one has to grow into it. But to try to sum up: a person in this final stage has integrated knowledge learned from others with the "inner truth" of experience and personal reflection and has found the courage to accept aloneness and vulnerability. He has also come to know that he will find strength and intimacy by sharing with others a committed way of life. He knows that committing and acting in living are like planting and caring for a seed. If it is a good seed and if he gives it good care, good results will occur. As I said, Perry didn't call it faith, but that's what it is.

Robert C. Fletcher, who received his Ph.D. in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a scientist who appears to have made the decision about Mormonism from the position of "commitment within relativism." In a paper read at the 1995 Sunstone Symposium, he indicates he has judged and thrust his staff of commitment in the relative stream at a point where the Church is. To me he said something like, "Here, here is where I choose to stand, because of my own reasoning and observations and what I choose to accept as the influence of the Holy Ghost." And since he has structured his life around his commitment, he said he has observed that a reliance on relationships with others provided in the structure of the Church produces what it promises. It is a fruit that, as Joseph Smith said in the King Follett discourse, "tastes good." Fletcher's courage is worth admiring, what he chose to commit to worth looking at.

Now, after this brief description of the Perry's scheme, I would like to use it to examine some of the tension in Levi Peterson's short story "The Canyons of Grace." For twelve years, this story has stirred uneasily in my consciousness. Thirty-year-old Arabella Gurney, an unmarried Mormon woman, finds herself on a University of Utah archeology dig in southern Utah. She feels conflicted because her devout religious background doesn't fit comfortably anymore.

At first, when we see Arabella take charge in camp and compete well with the camp wit, we admire her maturity. However, we soon discover that she is fending off some terrible anger. She seems to

be "using" the benign wilderness to help her get the courage "for translating her seditious thoughts into an irreversible act. . . . Hardly five years earlier she thought God loved to bless his children, but now she believes his subtle purpose was to demean them" (102). We are not told why her views changed. Though she still purports grudgingly to believe in God, she is trying to destroy his authority over her. Her plan is to do something that will anger him so greatly that he will cast her out. We are constrained to feel that something vile in her background has caused this much distress. But what could it be? Her background is Mormon! At this point many Mormon readers feel anxious and defensive.

She is pleased when Franklin, the camp's most desirable man, makes sexual overtures to her; she has, in fact, sought his attentions. A flashback shows an orthodox home and sexual education—another marker of the emotional distance she had traveled from her youthful religious roots. She had decided before she left home to have an affair, even though her parents, who have second-guessed her intentions, are dismayed. We learn there is something unfortunate in her family's background, an exaggeration of the Mormon principle of chastity. "Even married couples," her mother had warned, "shouldn't do things that will provoke each other before the Spirit tells you it is proper to make love." In other words, Arabella has been taught that sex is to occur only when the authority of the "Spirit" dictates it.

Now, who is smart enough to figure out which is "Spirit" and which is biology? And who interprets the Spirit's dictation? We may deduce from the fact that Arabella is one of ten children that her father felt the prompting of the Spirit often. Arabella might have also concluded that her mother was held prisoner by a "spirit" that kept her pregnant much of the time and took away much of her free agency where her body was concerned. So Arabella might have been determined to avoid becoming a prisoner in the same way. Her first rebellion was to refuse opportunities to marry an obedient Mormon man.

Just how much control over her own body does a woman have? Arabella will fight even God to get her own control. Yet remaining single did not mean she did not want sex. She obviously felt a need to confront the "Spirit" and affirm her own control over her body. Thus, if she deliberately decided

when to have sex and with whom, she would be in control, not under the dictatorship of the "Spirit." This position is logically consistent, though strange from an orthodox perspective. However, she couldn't easily rid herself of a belief in God. It was too much a part of her. She was experiencing just how hard it is to break away from the accumulated influence of traditions and religious indoctrinations. Her perspective seems to be: "God, you're there all right—you and your sacred laws of creation. But I hate it that I know that." Her reasoning had become clouded.

According to the Perry Scheme of Cognitive and Ethical Growth, Arabella is struggling to move from Position 6, "commitment foreseen," to Position 7, "commitments within relativism developed." The explanation for Position 6 may be paraphrased thus: "A person coming to this position sees that to move forward he must make commitments and that the ability to do so has to come from within himself. He foresees the challenge of responsibility and feels he needs to undertake it. He also senses that the first steps require arbitrary faith or willing suspension of disbelief. He knows he needs to narrow his focus, center himself, and become aware of internal strength. He realizes that he could be lost if he doesn't make a decision about an issue that he thinks is important—that if he can once make one decision, he will be free from outside authority and that everything else will fall into place."

Arabella must think that she would feel free if she could prove her courage by doing something big enough to count—a form of logic common and popular among adolescents. But she then retreats to a position more closely resembling Perry's first cognitive (dualistic) position and thinks that she will have to make a decision of rebellion or negation to feel any kind of freedom. Why? Because her life has been so tightly orchestrated by the dictates of God, handed down to her through her church and her parents, that she is fixated on God as the authority that must be challenged. Thus, in the beginning of the story, she deliberately attracts the attention of a man who will become her partner and instrument in this act of defiance. For that was what it was to be—"a thousand-megaton blow against the conformities of her previous life" (110).

From her fantasy of anticipated lovemaking with Franklin, we see she is still a virgin. However, her

mind and thoughts are not virginal; instead, she has concentrated deliberately on breaking sexual rules as the act by which she chooses to break the stalemate she feels she is in. Knowing the teachings she has had all her life and knowing how powerful the curiosity and biology of sex can be, it is not surprising to a Mormon reader that she has chosen a sexual adventure—defiantly outside of marriage with the assumption that the relationship will not be permanent—as the best way to get herself damned, for she believes damnation accompanies defying God's authority.

This story shows how clouded thinking can become when a person is trying to work her way through the positions on the Perry scheme. When an authority figure, the Mormon fundamentalist prophet Reuben Millring, comes on the scene, Arabella is shaken. She feels that the personification of the God she is defying has suddenly appeared before her. She finds herself with Reuben's heavy hands on her head, hearing his declaration from God that she will be his next wife:

She had scarcely registered the meaning of the old man's words; they had merged in her ears as intonations of fervor, threat, and revelation. As his heavy hands lifted from her scalp, electric sensations surged in her belly and thighs. She pulsed with an uncanny recognition. Though he was a man she had never seen before in her life, she found him familiar and felt in his behavior a perfect harmony with an unthought expectation. (112)

"Unthought expectation." It is the indoctrination and unconscious desire for the simplicity of dualism that pulls one back into old dualistic thinking. It does take courage to invite complexity by acknowledging the power of authority yet affirming one's choice to explore another path. Such affirmations are invariably interpreted as a challenge to that authority as well as spiritually dangerous deviations from simple, dualistic "truth." When those authority voices speak from a tried and tested tradition, they will marshal such argument as these: "How foolish! How can you imagine yourself wiser than God and his prophets? That's why we are so blessed. We've been shown a path to happiness." A barrage of parables and scriptures reinforces these reassertions of authority. Of course, these authoritative voices are correct—from their perspective. It *is* dangerous to

explore dark corners. The reward of resting in the mainstream is an uncomplicated life that promises the highest rewards in heaven.

Yet each individual needs to arrive at that truth in his own way. And for some it is not easy. Without some exploration, how can any of us arrive at the position where we feel we have freely reasoned about and freely chosen to be mainstream?

This question is no small matter to those who have little help from wise mentors, for those kept frightened by dogma, or for those who are moving into this new cognitive state of commitment within relativism. Peterson's Arabella is inching alone up the mountain, insisting that each step or decision—right down to what she does her own body—is her choice. She senses in a stubborn part of her being that she will gain something extremely valuable, if she can find her own light, and, correspondingly, that she will lose something valuable by lapsing back into dependence on anyone else. People in Arabella's position have to be willing to be called "fool," to accept the fact they might not succeed, and even that they will be in for damnation, as authority figures loudly warn. And unless something unusual reaches out, it is unlikely they can succeed.

The "something unusual" for Arabella is the "Holy Wild"—the raw, fettered life force. As impersonal and cruel as it can seem, it can make one question a judgmental God and it does accommodate uncommitted sex. That was the reason Arabella was drawn to it in a way that made Franklin call her an "animist." She had already suspected her motives as pagan, which had only increased her feelings of guilt.

But she persists. And while she is in the canyon where she feels courage to defy the old way of believing, she takes the action by seeking a lover, which she thinks will break her stalemate. I doubt most men would be impressed at being the first lover if they thought the woman's main motive was to get back at some cruel authoritative God figure. But Arabella's motives were not part of Franklin's decision.

Where is Franklin on the Perry scheme? One suggestion comes when he exclaims, "Divine creation, my foot! Don't you know that biologists can't even agree on what a species is?" (116) This statement shows he has moved beyond a reliance on simple authority and is at least on the "multiplicity"

level. He has also moved past accepting an authoritarian verdict about a future condition, for he says he isn't afraid of damnation. An indicator of even higher cognitive development is his remark: "You don't have to be religious to be decent" (119). Being a decent human being is something one can choose to be. When he proposes that Arabella move into his tent, it seems, on first reading, to be a simple sexual invitation; however, there are other suggestions that he is in love with her and may be ready to make a permanent commitment. Other facts in his favor are his commitment to his work, the value he places on it, his forthcoming promotion to professor, and his refusal to try to change Arabella's religious leanings; they collectively suggest that he is in the commitment-within-reality category, at least part of the time.

Arabella is struggling to move out of a dualistic position and become her own authority. Except when she regresses in fantasy to a simple, controllable world or when she is slammed there by the powerful drama Reuben forces upon her, she courageously holds what ground she has gained. She is in a transitional position, probably that which Perry calls "temporizing." Here she pauses to center herself and concentrate her purpose, readying herself to gather the courage to assert herself against pressures of concerned others, and to confront a God who she feels will damn her. Before Arabella can move resolutely on, however, she succumbs to feeling lost and impatient with herself: "Again she wavered, had second thoughts, and wondered whether she could reconcile herself to God's will. And again she marveled at her unrelenting, desperate compulsion to persist in her freedom—to the point of perdition, if necessary" (109).

After Arabella takes her one pivotal decision—breaking an important commandment of God—she tries to maintain the freedom she hoped she had gained. "She refused to think of God. In her feelings she had set arbitrary limits to the universe; it was no larger or more significant than this hot, bright wilderness in which she lived" (121).

When she is kidnapped by Reuben's sons and taken to their father, she is forced to reconfront, with emotional difficulty, all the barriers she thought she had left behind her. Still feeling those fears that are most difficult to discard—fear of damnation, fear

of rejection by an authority figure, fear of hurting those we love—she temporarily yields to Millring's imposition of authority upon her. He promises her both punishment and reward. The reward is his claim to have seen a sign from heaven that she is one of God's elect and will become the mother of the next leader of God's only true Church. This promise is one to which she would be especially vulnerable, because she had been raised in a culture where the highest calling for a woman is motherhood.

Emotionally exhausted and confused, Arabella regresses to her former position of dualism and blind obedience. But by this time, she has had some practice with her new freedom. After resting and feeling the symbolic effect of the ancient spear point that Franklin had given her (a wonderful symbol for cutting through restraints), she has strength to claim the progress she has made. At this time she rises up and literally and symbolically kills her old tormentor, the dualistic, judgmental, dictatorial God represented in Reuben. Equally symbolically, she escapes into the wilderness, which "she feels bears her no grudge and would still be willing to bless her. She was grateful to be alive and feeling the universe holy. She would mourn for Reuben, who was dead, and all the others who could not bear to know of their ultimate extinction" (135). Facing this abyss without retreating does take courage. In contrast, Reuben is in a stage at which he couldn't face extinction as a personal possibility; his solution was to retreat to an invented world he could tolerate. His followers likewise could not face that possibility and allowed him to act as their authority in assuring them of another reality.

In the concluding paragraph, Arabella, looking at a berry-laden juniper and a tall-stemmed yucca, "could *almost* believe they were friends who regarded her with warm affection" (135; emphasis mine). Yet she withholds that final fragment of faith. Arabella is like those who Perry says are in the most mature position—those who realize that all dogma is suspect, that symbols must be understood as symbols, but that one can choose to hope, commit, and act as if there will be a good result.

Further, Peterson writes, "In the open palm of her hand the Tabogauche point mirrored the rising sun" (135), hinting at a new beginning, along with the idea that now she can and will accept Franklin without needing him to be the means to the end of

her private vendetta against God.

The last sentence of the story is wonderful. The first half says, "And then she strode to the edge of the ridge to take her bearings" (135). A mature person in the commitment-within-relativity section of Perry's scale realizes that she will always be going to the brink of perception and taking her bearings. Often the way ahead can look as bleak as it did for Arabella's many miles of wilderness. Taking bearings means being aware of polarities and emotions that have controlled one's life in the past and may do so again. After a pause to look ahead honestly, the pilgrim usually develops a greatly expanded ability to see through fears, doubts, and anger. She can be with things as they are.

The last phrase in the sentence describes Arabella as "an ephemeral predator upon a minor planet" (135), a statement that she has courageously accepted the contingency and fragility of human consciousness in the universe. This attitude embodies the humility necessary before a pilgrim can face the fact that she must claim her reality with courage and commitment. Arabella is ready to do this—to submit to life as it is without fear. It is a painful road that lies before her, but "she went forward free and filled with grace" (135). In other words, Arabella is blessed with a surprise. In a flash, she realized she had her wish, the personal revelation she told Franklin she wanted so she could cease believing in the old God. And in the same flash she had a reconciliation—grace—a new understanding. In the Perry model, she has moved to a position of commitment within relativism.

This Perry scheme was originally developed to help teachers better meet the learning level of their students. It has been used by others in ways Perry never imagined, as, for instance, how Dr. Arnett used it in his Shakespeare class. Yet might there be another position that could be added to the scale? What adjectives would be used for a college senior described as achieving Position 9 after a lifetime of struggling to live there? I propose they might be the same as those we could use to describe Nora Eastman and the Indian, Sobe, at the end of Marilyn Brown's novel *Royal House*. It would seem that goodness increases as one's cognitive ability matures, that the glory of God is indeed intelligence—intelligence developed cognitively and ethically.

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NOTE

1. I use masculine pronouns for convenience in replicating Perry's ideas, but they are, of course, applicable to both men and women.

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APPENDIX: ADAPTATION OF PERRY SCHEME OF COGNITIVE AND ETHICAL GROWTH

Position 1 - Basic Duality. (Garden of Eden Position: All is well.) As the difficult process of cognitive and ethical growth begins, a person starts in a position called "basic duality." This means that he perceives meaning divided as into oppositional dichotomies: good/bad, right/wrong, we/they, success/failure, etc. He believes that there are absolute answers for every problem, that authorities know these answers, and that a hardworking student can learn them from such teachers. He does not decide things for himself he waits for others to tell him what to do.

It should be kept in mind that a person moving between positions can easily become depressed. It takes time for the "guts" to catch up with "leaps of mind." When a sense of loss is accorded the honor of acknowledgment, movement is more rapid and the risk of getting stuck in apathy, alienation, or depression is reduced. When the pilgrim steps into new perceptions, he is unlikely to take another until he comes to terms with the losses attendant on the first.

As he starts to grow in cognitive ability, a person becomes aware of differing opinions, even among authorities. He starts to feel uncertain. But he decides it is part of the authority's job to pose problems. It takes hard work to deny the legitimacy of diversity and to keep the belief in the simplicity of truth. He has become aware of the serpent's whispering.

Position 2 - Multiplicity Prelegitimate. (Hearing the serpent's whisper, but resisting.) Now the person accepts diversity but still thinks there are *true* authorities who are right—that the others are confused by complexities or are just frauds. The person thinks he is following the true authorities; he and they are right while all others are wrong. He accepts that good authorities present problems so he can learn to reach right answers independently.

The transitional stage between Position 2 and 3 is unsettling. Here, the pilgrim is forced to consider that good authorities can admit to not knowing all the answers yet; but he believes that they are surely on the way to finding the true answers, will teach what they know now, and

will teach the rest when they have it.

Position 3 - Multiplicity Legitimate but Subordinate. (Continued: struggling to resist the serpent's logic.) The person concedes that the nature of mortal experience naturally produces a diversity of opinions but this is as it should be. He still thinks that the authorities will figure it all out and hand on their conclusions eventually.

Note: In the three positions above, the individual feels abandoned when he is in unstructured learning environments. Uncertainties or diversities multiply until they tip the balance against certainty and homogeneity, precipitating a crisis that forces the construction of a new vision of the world, be it one marked by cynicism, anxiety, or a new sense of freedom. Now is a dangerous time, one that can be likened to Adam's and Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit and being exiled from the Garden of Eden.

As a person begins to make the transition from this position, he has three negative options and one positive option:

1. He might accept that authorities do not have answers that will help him. If they ever get these answers, it will not be for a long, long time, and the answers will not help him. Bitterness sets in. It seems as if rewards don't come by hard work and being right but from arbitrary factors or from performing to please the present (flawed) authority. Unable to distinguish between valid and false abstractions, he becomes disillusioned and possibly dangerously cynical. He often takes advantage of any opportunity that will yield personal profit.

2. He could decide there are no right answers available, only individual opinions, that any true judgment is impossible, and that he should therefore feel no ethical or moral restraints in choosing his behavior. All is of equal value. To have an opinion makes it right.

3. He becomes angry and frustrated. Instead of becoming cynical and opportunistic, or not anchored to any system, the person lashes out against society.

4. If he does not become permanently "stuck" in one of the three options above, the individual might see that some facts seem to yield consistently better choices among the many. He begins making choices that will, he hopes, bring him better consequences. He has moved closer to accepting relativity. (Man's heel has been bruised by the serpent, but he now sees his potential for crushing the serpent's head.) He trusts authorities to have valid grounds for their opinions. To get along, he tries to discover what it is the authorities who have power over him think and want. He begins comparatively weighing different factors and approaches to problems, not only in terms of outcomes but in terms of their inherent qualities. He is thinking about thinking. But he wants to conform so much that he has trouble thinking independently.

Position 5 - Relativism Discovered. (Accepting the lone and dreary world and continuing to find ways to crush the serpent's head.) As he accepts relativity as a worldview, he begins to see that thinking relatively isn't just what his authorities want him to accept but that it is the way the world works in most cases. Usually this new perspective is very satisfying; but it can also be very threatening, a time of profound anxiety, which may be handled in one of three ways:

1. He may become so anxious that he tries to retreat to a simpler thinking stage. He could become very inventive and determined in his attempts or very fervent in following someone else's ideas.

2. He might give in to the rage that comes with having to accept an unwanted conclusion. A person thus affected survives by avoiding complexity and ambivalence and regresses to dualism, Position 2 (multiplicity prelegitimate). He becomes dogmatically righteous and has a "righteous" hatred for otherness. He demands that authority figures just tell him what they want without attempting to engage him in thought.

3. He just gives up. He feels that he has no ability to make sense of life. He might decide to wait for some sign to make his decisions for him. As he waits, he isn't sure he will ever be able to be any different.

than he is now. He becomes apathetic and uses a negative understanding of multiplicity and relativism as a way to avoid commitment. He is drifting and has some sense that later he will find that he has lived a hollow life. He feels guilt, shame, and uneasiness because he is failing to take responsibility, yet he feels so detached that he cannot create any meaningful involvement. He starts to rely on impulse. This stage can become a settled condition. "For [people] reporting their recovery of care, . . . their period of alienation appears as a time of transition. In this time, the self is lost through the very effort to hold onto it in the face of inexorable change in the world's appearance. It is a space of meaninglessness between received belief and creative faith. In their rebirth, they experience in themselves the origin or meanings, which they had previously expected to come to them from outside." (Perry, 92) After this stage, the individual will feel frustration in a too-structured environment.

Position 6. Commitment Foreseen. (Hope that the serpent's head can truly be crushed). To move forward, the pilgrim sees that he must make commitments, and that the ability to do so has to come from within himself. He foresees the challenge of responsibility and feels he needs to undertake it. He also senses that the first steps require arbitrary faith or willing suspension of disbelief. He knows he needs to narrow his focus, center himself, and become aware of internal strength. He realizes that he could be lost if he doesn't make a decision about an issue that he thinks is important—that if he can once make one decision, he will be free from outside authority and that everything else will fall into place.

Position 7. Commitments in Relativism Developed. (Continuing the battle with the serpent, who is trying to bring man down by bruising his heel or, in other words, forcing relativity on man; man is learning to crush his head by accepting and learning to deal with the relativity.) A person makes the first commitment with the new awareness of relativism. More and more he feels his inner abilities, foresees responsibility with excitement, and anticipates increased empowerment as he makes more commitments and choices. But he has moments of feeling that everything else is still in limbo, and he foresees that problems will arise as he tries to juggle conflicting responsibilities.

Position 8. Commitments in Relativism Continue. (Now the serpent's head is receiving many well-placed blows.) The person makes several more commitments, while realizing he must find balance and establish painful priorities of energy, action, and time. Periodically, he experiences serenity and well-being in the midst of complexity. He accepts the fact that order and disorder are fluctuations in experience. He searches for models of knowledgeability—i.e., successful cultures, institution, people—and finds the courage to choose and to commit in full awareness of uncertainty.

The transition between Positions 8 and 9 again brings some trauma: periods of feeling that everything is contradictory and that he just can't make sense out of life's dilemmas. But he begins to develop his sense of irony and sees he must embrace viewpoints in conflict with his own, not in the old multiplistic way of "separate but equal" or "live and let live" but in a true embracing of what might as well be called "love."

Position 9. Commitments in Relativism Further Developed. (The serpent's head is crushed.) The individual now:

1. Has a developed sense of irony.
2. Can accept life as just that—"life"—just the way it is! He can truly embrace others' viewpoints.
3. Holds the commitments he makes in "provisional ultimacy," meaning that what he chooses to accept as truth is his truth. He acts as if it were ultimate truth, yet still has a "provision" for change if needed. He is wholehearted, but tentative.
4. Has no illusions about having "arrived" permanently at some condition of stasis. He knows he will have to retrace his journey over and over but hopes to do it each time more wisely.

5. Is aware that he is developing his identity through commitment.

6. Can affirm the inseparable nature of the knower and the known, meaning he knows that he, as knower, contributes to what is known.

7. Helps weld a community by sharing the realization of his aloneness; he gains strength and intimacy through this shared vulnerability.

8. Senses a need to hold polarities in tension in the interest of truth.

9. Can maintain meaning, coherence, and value while conscious of their partial, limited, and contradictable nature.

10. Embraces and transcends opposites: certainty/doubt, focus/breadth, idealism/realism, tolerance/contempt, stability/flexibility.

11. Begins to affirm and hold absolutes in symbols while still acknowledging them to be relativistic.

13. Has a sense of living with trust in the midst of heightened awareness of risk.

14. Has discarded obedience in favor of his own agency, and continues to select, judge, and build. (He continues to become "wise" as the Gods.)

Levi Peterson's "Grace" and Perry's Scheme with Bell's Curves

Marilyn Brown

I've been fascinated with Perry's Scheme of Cognitive Growth, which Veda Tebbs Hale introduced me to, and the way she outlines Arabella's enlightenment in Levi S. Peterson's story "Canyons of Grace." However, as much as Arabella may be feeling filled with grace, now owning herself as she stands on the top of her mountain, she has yet to show me how she maintains any commitments to herself or society. In fact, as I observed her breaking down her commitment by having sex, I wondered if I could trust her to be a commitment keeper. Or I wondered if Levi S. Peterson's story was actually suggesting that, if we break that commitment and have sex outside of marriage, we'll feel freer.

Any way you slice it, very little in Arabella's past or future looks like what I would call authentically "Mormon." Furthermore, there are elements in Levi's stories that are so bizarre that they seem "anti-Mormon" because, like decoys, they lead readers along false trails, emphasizing the weird fringe elements of Mormonism, launching into the fanatic and sometimes disgusting behaviors that have traditionally separated us from regular people. His tone in describing those elements—the polygamous Reuben, the mother's injunction to have sex only when the spirit dictates—is always reductive. I have the uncomfortable feeling that outsiders who want to believe Levi's picture of Mormonism laugh with glee at these images, fall in love with them, and stop searching for or considering anything else.

The rekindled interest in Jane Austen and Willa Cather convinces me that conflict and growth can happen in increments that do not include murder, rape, and filth—the popular elements of transgressive literature. Especially Mormon murder, Mormon rape, and Mormon filth. Levi seems to present to us some weird looks at fringe Mormonism, but I want to see the main essence of Mormonism—the pure

and full light that I know. His stories remind me of a traffic semaphore that displays red, yellow, and blue lights. It's an incorrect signal, and I only partially connect with it. Mormons deserve full connections in their literature—not only with other Mormons, but with other human beings.

I did connect with Veda's Perry Scheme. I recognized that moment of first discovery—the realization that the world isn't black and white, that authorities didn't always have the answers. We all have those moments of awakening. Elouise Bell's "Christmas Letters" article is about moving through the transitions of awakening. The main gist of the essay is that she has made a transition from her "earlier, dumber days," when she was "flippant and even ridiculing about Christmas newsletters." This year, she says, she looked forward to getting every one, and she read them "top to bottom."

How did Elouise make this transition? Why, although she didn't know it, she was moving along the Perry Scale. She begins with early childhood: "One thing that happens when we navigate that choppy stretch of water between childhood and adulthood is that we become suspicious." (And in most cases rightly so. We must be skeptical and cautious to survive, alas.) At first, the child who trusts in the black and white dualism must slowly kill some of those old absolutes. Bell cites Santa Claus: "The child who connected heart and soul with Santa Claus becomes the teenager who, like the fictional Holden Caulfield, suspects everyone of being 'phony.'" When the world proves to be relativistic, an individual can turn on it with anger—pushing away any reminder of that past philosophy that let him or her down. Elouise knows the mentality well.

Many of us read the cheery, triumph-studded yearly accounts—"Jim is now assistant vice-president in charge of

deliveries; MyrnaLou has made all our bunk beds from Styrofoam egg cartons" and we grumble to ourselves because we know our own year's long list of disasters. In those harried decades, the newsletters may sound to us like the latest chorus of "Nyah-nyah-NYAH-nyah-nyah."

The person of suspicion hears the person of faith's statements as though they are phony, stupid, and annoying. Arabella is disillusioned with her black and white background and gets close to Perry's "What the heck! Anything goes!" attitude. I'm sure there are Mormons who reach this state—teenagers mostly. But it's not really a Mormon given or even a result of our cultural beliefs. At least I don't see it that way. "What the heck, anything goes" is not a typical Mormon attitude. Was it really an authentic Mormon reaction for Arabella to kill a polygamist—or even to run across such a man as Reuben, who represents the God-authority she is trying to kill?

Somewhere, I can't recall exactly where, I read a news article headlined: "Son Killed Father, Ate Brain." Its gist was that a man stabbed his father to death with a Swiss Army knife, dismembered the body, and ate part of the brain in an attempt to free what he believed were evil spirits. Wow! This boy must have been one of Levi's Mormons. He believed in spirits. He believed evil spirits had taken over his father's body. (Just watch Levi come up afterwards and ask me if I remember more details of this monumentally symbolic story.) Both Levi and the news media know how to use sensationalism to get our attention. It sells and it's popular. But why the underside of the warts? Why do people as wonderful as Eugene England say that Levi's vision of Jesus as he flushes the urinal in the *Backslider* is "one of the most lovely and believable epiphanies I have encountered in modern fiction?" Wow!

My husband, Bill Brown, and I just bought Springville's Villa Theater. (By the way, playwrights, come forward! We're going to do some original work.) I've been scraping up gobs of gum; but rather than describe this delightful activity to you, I'd rather spend my energy and words telling you that I am excited about writing an original musical production of *The Nutcracker* for next Christmas. That joy is where I live in my thoughts, in the grace at the peak of Arabella's mountain. (I guess if he doesn't call it Mormon, I'll allow Levi his warts if he and the

rest of the skeptical world will allow us our joy.)

Finally, in Elouise's piece, she matures to the final position on the ladder of the Perry Scheme. She gets past the angry stage to Arabella's stage of grace, offering us her convictions and faith so that we know of her commitment.

If the newsletters are filled with only the successes, and if those successes are inflated by an enthusiastic spouse or parent, well—don't we all spruce up for a family portrait? When you receive a nice photograph in the mail, you realize there may be pins holding things together beneath the finery, that behind that flashing smile there may be hundreds of dollars worth of crowns, bridges, and retainers, that there may have been tears and unkind words on the way to the photo studio. But for me, the minuses no longer cancel out the pluses. I take good will where I find it.

I know that negatives exist. The artist is often used to thinking his negatives will either (1) spice up real humdrum life or (2) shock people into being better to avoid the negative. However, it seems to me that there are enough negatives in journalism. The whole idea of being Mormon is to focus on the perfect society we are trying to create. And we know that it is *thoughts* that create the future.

I'll admit that Arabella is standing on the threshold of grace on the Perry Scale, but for me it wasn't a Mormon mountain. Now I want to see focused Mormons making progress on the Perry Scale. I want to see some well-written Mormon literature that may show us some warts yet ring true in ways that seem real, instead of anti-Mormon or sensational. I'm dreaming that it's possible to create a literature about and by Mormon people along the scale of cognitive and ethical growth in a way that doesn't feed the stereotypes others have of us. I want to be a part of creating this literature.

John Schaar in *Escape from Authority* gives us a suggestion of how that literature will come about in the future: "The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created—created first in mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination." (134)

Are we really going to make a *Mormon* literature? If we reach Perry's stage of commitment, we're ready to commit ourselves to perform that miracle in a climate of love, as we strive to understand the paradoxes while we are looking toward the light.

MARILYN BROWN is a novelist of Mormon historical events: the settling of Utah Valley and recently Utah's *Statehood* (Aspen Books). She is now writing original musicals for her family's Villa Theatre in Springville: *The Nutcracker: The Musical*, which premiered at Christmas 1996, *The Light Piano*, scheduled for 1998, and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream: The Musical*, for 2000. This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 13 January 1996, at Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

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Organically Grown Humor: Remarks and Readings from *The Unlikely Romance of Kate Bjorkman*

Louise Plummer

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Lately, I've been dating my checks 1955. It may be simple unconscious negligence—there's a lot of that in my life. It may be the onset of Alzheimer's. Or it may be that I'd like to go back and be thirteen years old again. When I was thirteen, I was in seventh grade at Hamilton Elementary School on Eighth South and Eighth East in Salt Lake. I was in love with the gym teacher, Mr. Garrison; and the summer between sixth and seventh grade, I called him on the phone at least once a week and said in a deep and sexy voice, "Hello, is John there?"

He'd say in his deep and sexy voice, "John who?"

I would break into hormonal hysteria, hang up the phone, and wet my pants. Thirteen was thrilling.

Mr. Garrison made us watch the World Series, which in 1955 was played at the end of September, on a black and white TV set he brought from home. He'd yell at anyone who knocked the rabbit ears askew, intensifying an already spotty reception. Our class was pretty evenly divided in their devotions to either the Brooklyn Dodgers or the New York Yankees. I was a Dodger fan. Mr. Garrison favored whichever team was losing, because he wanted the series to play the full seven days. Now that I am a teacher, I know why. The World Series was an easy preparation.

I loved baseball, because Mr. Garrison loved it. I collected baseball cards. I had Mickey Mantle. I had Willie Mays. I had Roy Campanella and Jackie Robinson. I had them all. Now I like to torture my four sons with this list.

"Do you know how much they'd be worth now?" they ask me, their mouths in tense little ovals.

"I do know what they're worth now," I tell them, "but then they were worth three for a dime. Besides," I say, "I bought them for love of a man."

My sons gag at romantic frivolities.

I am going to tell you a series of anecdotes about myself and my family similar to the one I just told you. These anecdotes have absolutely no connection to one another, still I hope to build up a tension, as in a novel, but you don't have to worry, because the tension will all be mine. This tension will reach a crisis, but again, it will be my crisis, and not yours. It will all end mercifully with a dénouement.

Story number two: Over the last few years I have developed an allergy to shrimp, which is one of my favorite foods. A simple allergy: I eat shrimp and break into hives. The first time I broke into hives, I called my doctor to see what could be done about it, and he said to drink a fourth of a cup of Benadryl. I did that, and the hives went away. I also got a good night's sleep. I didn't stop eating shrimp. Instead, I made a joke about the allergy: "I always have my shrimp with a Benadryl chaser," I would tell friends.

Last spring, my husband, Tom, and I went with Al and Ginny Wirthlin to the China Lily in Provo for Chinese food. Al and Ginny always want to share dishes in Chinese restaurants, and I find myself having to assert my unpopular point of view as I did again on this particular evening: "I don't want to share," I said. "I hate sharing. I want curried shrimp and I want all of it. I don't want to taste your almond chicken, your sweet and sour pork, and your Peking duck with snow peas. I just want shrimp!"

They looked at me as if I were the B-word woman of the nineties, shrugged their shoulders, and shared with each other and Tom. I ate the most generous serving of shrimp I've ever eaten in any restaurant. There must have been two dozen shrimp on my plate. I didn't share a one with anyone. It was a completely satisfying meal.

After dinner, Tom and I went home. I was

standing in the middle of our bedroom when I realized that, although I didn't have any hives, my tongue was swelling up and so was my throat. "My throat is closing," I said to Tom. I went in the bathroom and guzzled Benadryl straight from the bottle and made Tom give me a blessing.

We drove to the emergency room of the hospital. "Let's just sit in the car for a few minutes," I said. "I think the Benadryl may be working." The truth is that I find trips to the emergency room embarrassing. I'm afraid they'll laugh at me and say, "It's all in your head. Go away, so we can help this guy having a seizure." The only thing worse than that scenario would be to die and have everyone at my funeral sniggering over my shrimp overdose.

For this same reason, I put off having plastic surgery.

We stayed half an hour in the parking lot and drove home.

The next day I called Al and Ginny and told them about my throat closing. They laughed and said it was because I was selfish. They said it was God's punishment. They said I deserved it.

Now I share. I can't have shrimp anyway.

Story number three: Our family moved last year from a large house in Provo to a high-rise condominium in downtown Salt Lake. Tom and I thought that we should begin some new Christmas tradition that had to do with living in the city, so we hired two horses and carriages to drive our family around downtown to see the lights on Christmas night. This was a big hit with our children and grandchildren.

Our driver, Corey from the Bronx, was cheerful and talkative, although his conversation leaned toward the scatological. I take the blame for this, because when we got into the carriage, I asked him if he knew how roosters and hens had sex. This, I think, gave him permission to continue with this topic, only moving from chickens to humans. In any case, he didn't tell us anything that any of us, including the three-year-old, didn't already know.

But now I'm doing what my sixteen-year-old son, Sam, does with all his stories. He begins anywhere but the beginning, and it's confusing and irritating.

The beginning of this story happened on Christmas Eve when our whole family was eating dinner. The question arose—maybe I asked it, because I've

wondered about it all my life—*how* and *when* do chicken eggs get fertilized? My sons Ed and Charles insisted that the rooster inseminates the eggs after they are laid.

"That doesn't make sense," I said. "The shell is hard. What good would a liquid spray be on a hard egg shell?"

"It penetrates the egg," Ed said.

"That's what happens in humans," Charles said.

"Human eggs don't have a hard outer shell," I said, although I hadn't, and still don't have, a clue as to the density of human ovum.

Sam said it happened by osmosis.

I said I'd seen birds trying to have sex in the air. Wouldn't roosters and hens do it the same way?

The women sided with me.

Finally, Camille, Jonathan's friend, said her father would know. "He comes from a farm," she told us. "I'll call him and tell you tomorrow night."

So we gathered together on Christmas night and Camille reported, "The rooster gets on the hen and spreads her feathers." Her fingers fluttered and fanned the air. "Then he inserts this powdery stuff. It's powdery," she said.

"Oh—" we all said, "It's *powdery*," as if that were the main point.

It was fresh on my mind when we got in Corey's carriage in front of Abravanel Hall. "It's powdery," I told him. "Did you know that?"

"Hell, no," he said. "They don't have any chickens in the Bronx."

* * *

We have now passed the crisis point in this talk. I have used you as guinea pigs. This has been an experiment for me to see if I have control over my humor. When Susan Howe asked me to read from my novel, she said, "Preface it with a five- or ten-minute discussion on how your humor works."

I don't know how my humor works. I just write about the world as I see it. The assumption is that I know when I'm being funny and that I can turn it on and off like a cold drink dispenser, that I have some control over my material, that I know what's even appropriate, and it also assumes that you and I can agree on what's humorous. I'm supposed to know what strikes you funny in advance.

I have tested all of that out today by telling you three stories that I thought were humorous. At the

time I wrote them, I was pretty sure you'd like them, but I wasn't absolutely positive. You, with your laughter and smiles, have encouraged me to think that I do know what is funny.

I learned long ago that not everyone even has a sense of humor. I am as dismayed by humorless people as I am sure they are dismayed with me. The dénouement of my remarks is one last story, but I must warn you that it leaves the question of my humor unresolved.

A few years ago, I gave a talk at BYU Women's Conference as part of a panel on humor. The talk was called "Thank You Very Much, Rock Hudson and Doris Day," and it was a funny talk. You'll have to take my word for it, because I don't have time to repeat it. But in the talk I told about my first date with Tom, whom I had known casually for years, because we grew up in the same ward, but we didn't begin dating until a year after he returned from his mission. We went to the movies at the Tower Theater in Salt Lake City, which was showing an Ingmar Bergman picture. In one scene, a woman confronts a priest who is also her lover, and says, "You don't love me anymore, do you? It's my eczema, isn't it?" and she holds out her hands, which are covered with an ugly, lumpy rash.

Tom and I snorted and stifled our laughter.

The next day was Fast Sunday and a sister stood up in testimony meeting and said she was grateful to the Lord for curing her eczema.

From the back of the chapel, I looked at Tom, who was sitting at the organ, and we shared a silent guffaw. In that moment, I knew we would marry.

The day after I told this story at the women's conference, I had a book signing at BYU Bookstore. I had a brand-new novel out, and the store had ordered 250 copies. Every single copy—all of them hardback—was sold. Every copy of an earlier novel was sold. They would have bought locks of my hair if they had been for sale. Women stood in a long line in front of my table. One after another they told me how much they liked my humor, how much they loved me. It would have been a good day to die.

Except for this reality check: Two women, who did not stand in line and had not bought books, stood at the side of the table where I was sitting. They were both about thirty-eight, good-looking,

well-coiffed women, and they were smiling pretty, pink smiles.

I smiled back, still signing books. Then one of them leaned forward and whispered, "What about the temple?"

"What *about* the temple?" I asked.

"What about what it says about light-mindedness?" The other one said. They were smiling and looked so friendly that I was thoroughly baffled and ignorant. It took moments to realize that this was a hostile visit and that I was being censured.

I made a little speech about everyone not finding the same things humorous. I was polite.

Then one of them finally got direct, although still smiling. She said that I had deeply offended her because she had once had a bad case of eczema and it was no laughing matter.

Let me say now what I didn't say then. Give me a break! Eczema *is* funny unless you have it. In fact, all rashes are funny unless you have them. Peeing in your pants is funny as long as it's past tense. Sex is funny and so are chickens. Chickens having sex is funny. The word "scatological" is a funny word. So is "ovum." Why do we call it *ovum*? Having your throat close after a gluttonous helping of shrimp when you know you're allergic is stupid and funny. But I feel a little like Dorothy Parker when she tried to define what humor meant to her: "Every time I tried to," she writes, "I had to go and lie down with a cold wet cloth on my head."

I like Richard Bissell's evasive and irresponsible definition: "Humor is funny stuff." I think I'll leave it at that.

I have written a funny novel. It came out a few months ago and is called *The Unlikely Romance of Kate Bjorkman*. The concept for the novel came from my teenage niece, Kelli. She was disgusted with my two previous novels where the main character loves the wrong guy and only at the end realizes who the right guy is. "But," she complained to me, "I want to read a story about the girl and the right guy."

This was on my mind when I walked through BYU Bookstore's children's department one Christmas. There were all the same Christmas books stacked on tables: *The Greatest Christmas Pageant Ever*, *The Polar Express*, *I'm Santa Claus and I'm Famous*. There were no Christmas young adult novels; and I thought, I will write a Christmas

romance novel that my niece will like.

I set out to do this, placing the novel in St. Paul, Minnesota, where I used to live and where it always snows at Christmastime and also where people skate outside on frozen city lakes. It is an ideal romantic Christmas landscape. I began writing the novel while proctoring a final exam. I began in a third-person narrative, copying category romances I'd read years before. The protagonist's name was Brooke, and she had an ideal figure and personality and was thoroughly lovable and deserving of love.

Thirty pages into it, I wanted to throw up. I was writing a romance novel. I didn't want to be the writer of a romance novel. My thirteen-year-old self was colliding with the more ironic fifty-something self. I needed help.

Help came when, quite coincidentally, Rick Walton, a local picture book writer, gave me a copy of *The Romance Writer's Phrase Book*. It is simply a listing of romance tags that its authors claim every romance writer needs to use to be successful. Romance tags take the emotional temperature of the heroine and her beloved in every breathless sentence. So instead of writing, "He reached out and touched her arm," you would write, "A tingling of excitement raced through her as his fingers trailed sensuously down her arm."

The Romance Writer's Phrase Book is divided into sections such as "Physical Characteristics," "Body Movements," "Facial Expressions," "Emotions," "Sex," and so on. Let me read you a list of tags under the subheading "Kisses," which comes under the general heading of sex:

- Reclaiming her lips, he crushed her to him.
- Her calm was shattered by the hunger of his kisses.
- His tongue sent shivers of desire racing through her.
- His lips were hard and searching.
- His lips seared a path down her neck, her shoulders.
- His kiss sent new spirals of ecstasy through her.
- She had a burning desire, an aching need, for another kiss.

and finally:

- Their lips met and she felt buffeted by the winds of a savage harmony.

Reading *The Phrase Book* gave me the idea for a

romance novel that was both romantic and funny. A book that contained real romance but plenty of parody. I walked a fine line. If there was not enough romance and too much parody, the young girls wouldn't like it. But if there was too much romance and not enough parody, then I wouldn't like it.

I began the book again with a character named Kate Bjorkman, who is brainy, who is six feet tall in her stocking feet, who is legally blind without her glasses with lenses thick as department store windows, and who dislikes romance novels herself, but as she says, has *lived* a romance. She also has an attitude. Listen to her voice as I read you the Prologue:

This is one of those romance novels. You know, that disgusting kind with kisses that last three paragraphs and make you want to put your finger down your throat to induce projectile vomiting. It is one of those books where the hero has a masculine-sounding name that ends in an unvoiced velar plosive, like CHUCK (although that is not my hero's name), and he has sinewy muscles and makes guttural groanings whenever his beloved is near. In romance novels, the heroine has a feminine-sounding name made up of liquid consonants, like FLEUR, and has full, sensuous lips—yearning lips. I think the word "yearning" will appear at least a thousand times in this book. The heroine also has long, silky legs and is a virgin.

The reason I know about romance novels at all is because my best friend, Ashley, was addicted to them last year, our junior year, and insisted I read them too. The trouble with romance novels, I soon discovered, is that they make you feel bad about your life, especially if there is no CHUCK in it, and especially if you don't have long, silky legs and your name ends in an unvoiced dental plosive as mine does (Kate) and very especially if you think you're going to be a virgin for the rest of your life. Mostly, though, romance novels are sappy in the extreme. They read like junior high school daydreams. I've never read one that I could really believe. None of them sounds like real life. And I want real life. Even in novels, I want real life.

So what do you do if you have lived a real romance, and it happened at Christmas, and the guy has a masculine-sounding name, Richard, and it ends up that he loves you as much as you love him? I know what I want to do. I want to write a romance novel

about it. I want it to end with "they lived happily ever after," and we really have.

Sort of. This all happened last December and it is now the middle of February, so we have lived happily ever after for six weeks. But how many people do you know who are exhilaratingly happy for six weeks? I know it's a record for me.

I want to gloat and bask in this lovely feeling of being in love. And if I do not have long, silky legs and long, blond locks, I do have sensuous, full lips, and if I have not written three-paragraph kisses, I have kissed them.

I'm giving this my best shot. I've got *The Romance Writer's Phrase Book* right next to the word processor in case I'm at a loss for words, as they say. If you are jaded about romance or have PMS or are on the down side of manic depression and can't stand to read about other people's happiness, then get real. This book is not for you.

The novel opens two days before Christmas and ends two days after New Year's. Kate's brother Bjorn comes home for a surprise visit from college with his new wife and his best friend, Richard Bradshaw, whom Kate has loved ever since she was a child, but whom she hasn't seen in four years. Kate and Richard fall in love easily on Christmas morning when they go ice-skating. This is Chapter 8, which begins, "Are you ready for the three-paragraph kiss?" The two of them skate and talk for several pages and then this happens:

It was then, as we twirled at the edge of the ice close to the snowbank, that my skate caught on a bump in the ice, and, losing my balance, I fell against Richard, who struggled for a few brief seconds to keep us vertical but failed. We crashed to the ice, limbs flailing in all directions.

"Are you okay?" Richard hovered over me.

"My glasses—" The whole world seemed hidden behind a gray, gauzy film. I heard a car on the road above us but could not see it, not even a shadow. "I can't see."

He twisted around. "Oh geez," he said. He reached in back of him and, turning, handed me my glasses. "I'm sorry," he said.

One sidepiece had completely broken off, and the other was badly twisted. Knowing better, I tried to

straighten it, and it snapped off in my hands. Luckily the frames and the lenses were almost intact. One lens had a deep crack running through it. "From glasses to pince-nez," I said to Richard, who still crouched over me. "Do you think it's an improvement?" I tried to balance the frames on my nose, but they fell into my lap.

"Can you see anything without them?" he asked.

I looked into his face, which was inches from mine.

"You," I said. "I can see you."

I don't know if it was the fact that I wasn't wearing my glasses just then, and I was prettier without them, that moved him to kiss me—that would have been Ashley's reasoning—or if it was that he had wanted to kiss me all morning, glasses or no glasses, or if it was simply impulsive. Richard kissed me. "Kate," he said, his lips grazing mine as he spoke. Then his mouth closed down on mine, but it was not, as the phrase book says, "like soldering heat that joins metals." It was warm like summer. And he did not, as the phrase book says, take my mouth "with a savage intensity," nor did he "smother" my lips with "demanding mastery," nor did he "devour" me, nor was it a "punishing kiss." I wouldn't have liked any of that macho stuff. His hands—when had he removed his gloves?—held my face, and I reached up and held his wrist. It was like summer, his kiss was. Have I said that?

Frankly, I'm finding that writing a three-paragraph kiss is difficult—impossible, maybe. I'm thinking that what it felt like explicitly and where our tongues were explicitly and that usual kind of three-paragraph detail is none of your damn business.

The phrase book is right: "I did "breathe lightly between parted lips" when it was over. We grinned at each other, a little foolishly, maybe. He pulled me up to my feet.

So now it's time for the full-body kiss, because his arms did slip around me easily, drawing me in, and I wound my arms around his neck. He kissed my hair; I kissed his face, which smelled of soap, and then, "reclaiming her lips, he crushed her to him."

Even if that were true, I could never write such a thing. Even if his touch was "divine ecstasy," even if the warmth of him was "intoxicating," even if my body was "tingling," I couldn't write that. It sounds stupid.

I can tell you another thing: he did not "lift me into the cradle of his arms." I'm six feet tall, for pity's

sake!

And even though we were smashed together in a pleasing way, my "soft curves" were not "molded to the contours of his lean body." This was Minnesota in December. We had so many clothes on, we might as well have been steel-belted radial tires.

Not only is this a novel about romance and the silliness surrounding it, it is also a book about writing. Kate is very aware of the writing process as she moves through the book, often quoting her English teacher, Mr. Midgely. She decides after three chapters to include her revision notes right in the manuscript so that she won't forget them, obviously planning to integrate them into the novel on a second draft. These revision notes are written on her mother's old stationery and appear in the book with decorative strips at the top and bottom of the page and also in a different font. Originally, I wanted them on yellow paper, but this was too expensive to carry out.

I'll read one of these revision chapters:

My parents sound too perfect. All that good humor, all that affection, not to mention the good cooking, will make readers want to puke, or will make them think their own parents are horrific duds. My parents are okay, but I've made them depressingly good-natured. Somehow I need to work in their weaknesses. Here's a list of ten items each:

My Father's Weaknesses and Imperfections:

1. *He has never in his life attended any PTA meeting or school function that I or Bjorn has participated in. Never. "Your mother will make a video," he says.*

2. *He has never watched one of Mother's videos.*

3. *He thinks the Boy Scouts of America is a fascist organization and that Eagle Scouts grow up to become serial killers. He did allow Bjorn to join the Scout troop, but he made him promise not to make Eagle.*

4. *He farts whenever and wherever he pleases.*

5. *When driving, he weaves across lanes and brakes for green lights, and if anyone complains, he'll stop the car in the middle of the traffic.*

6. *He has a little paunch and moles all over his back.*

7. *If Mother didn't choose his clothes, he'd wear black dress shoes and black socks with his jeans.*

A couple of alcoholic rages might improve this list, but I'd be lying. Oh, he does go into a rage if anyone removes the stapler or paper punch from his study and doesn't return it. That could be number 8.

9. *I can't think of anything else.*

10. *Still can't think.*

My Mother's Weaknesses and Imperfections

1. *This first one is easy. Even my dad doesn't know. Occasionally she goes down to the basement to have a smoke. I've known this since I was five. Marlboro Lights. Not often, just occasionally. So she's a hypocrite.*

2. *Of the good, the true, and the beautiful, she ranks beauty first without hesitation. (Which is why she has no problem with a little hypocrisy.)*

3. *She hates cats. Especially cat motifs in decorating—like needlepoint cats, cat calendars. Even kittens. Thinks they should be crushed like cockroaches. (Guess I won't put that in the book.)*

4. *She thinks long-stemmed roses are a cliché. But is that really a weakness?*

5. *She enjoys dirty jokes. Jokes too filthy to tell in this book.*

6. *When anyone asks her if either of her children is as gifted visually as she is, she replies, "No, they take after Nels—they're visual pygmies."*

7. *She adores gossip.*

8. *She can't resist looking at herself in any mirror or plateglass window.*

9. *When she's burned out after a big job, she won't talk.*

10. *If it weren't for Nair, she'd have a little mustache. (If she ever reads this, she'll kill me.)*

Pretty lame lists. They lack violence. I could tell about the famous fight. The one that has become family folklore. This is the way Mother tells it:

"Oh, that fight! it was years ago, of course. Nels and I were both young and hormonal. He said something hurtful to me. I honestly don't remember what it was. Don't have a clue. I got angry and raged through the house, slamming doors and kicking things.

"Nels felt terrible immediately and began following after me and saying how he wished he'd never said it, whatever it was, and, please, would I forgive him. I didn't want to forgive him. I wanted him dead, preferably torn apart by ravenous rottweilers. But he wouldn't just let me go and cool off. He wanted to fix it right then. Nels gets kind of pathetic and cloying

when I'm mad at him.

"Anyway, I locked myself upstairs in the master bathroom, filled the tub with water, removed my clothes, and got in. Nels stood on the other side of the door and begged me to let him in. I told him to drop dead. Then he began to take the doorknob and lock apart. I was shouting, 'Get out of here. Can't you leave me alone?' Really I was crazy.

"He brought in the desk chair, the one with the cotton upholstered seat, and before he could sit down on it, I took a washrag filled with water and slapped it down onto that seat.

"He looked at the seat. He looked at me. I could see the wheels turning in his head and then he stepped into the tub and sat down—with all his clothes on and he was wearing wool tweed! He was even wearing his shoes! We were both crammed into that tub.

"What could I do except burst out laughing? And then I cried and told him he had hurt my feelings and let him tell me he was sorry. And we made up."

When Mother tells this story, Dad always says, "Yes, we did," with the kind of smirk you don't like to see on a parent's face. Who wants to think about their parents doing it? All that flab meshed together. Disgusting. And I'm trying to point out their weaknesses, but they tell this story themselves, dramatizing the details and making fun of themselves. Mother says, "I was being very neurotic."

This story may be too charming to tell. I told it to Shannon, and she thought it was a very romantic thing for my father to do. She practically swooned at the idea, even though he's an old man. And that's exactly what I don't want to do, tell yet another story that makes them look charming. I'm going to have to think about this some more.

I don't expect ever to have as much fun again writing a novel as I did writing this one. I said it was a Christmas romance, and it is. The working title was *Sort of a Christmas Romance*. I confess that I miss that title. The marketing people at Bantam Doubleday Dell didn't want Christmas in the title because they said booksellers would return the books after Christmas. So I relented and changed the title. But during Christmas when I saw the Christmas books stacked up on special tables at local bookstores and my book was not among them, I felt utterly sad. I had written a Christmas book and it was hidden on the shelf with its new title, *The Unlikely Romance of Kate Bjorkman*.

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I Have Come to the Whirlwind to Converse with the Father: The Book of Job as a Ceremony of Irony

Harlow Söderborg Clark

I was sitting in the temple one day contemplating the third chapter of Genesis, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, traditionally called the fall, but which Mormons usually see as a step upward, contemplating, specifically, the part where the Serpent says to Eve, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" when the question occurred to me, How does Satan know that God did, indeed, tell Adam and Eve they could not partake of every tree, that one tree was forbidden to them? Perhaps, though it seems unlikely, God told him. More likely, Satan was listening in on the conversation.

A second question occurred to me: Was God unaware that Satan was listening in? But how could he be unaware? And if he was aware, was he powerless to stop Satan? Having instructed Adam and Eve, did he just sadly resign himself to the fact that Satan would come in and wreck everything? Surely he knew that, if Satan were listening, he would try everything to stop Adam and Eve from obeying. Perhaps, the thought occurred to me, rather than let that happen, God told Adam and Eve not to do exactly what he wanted them *to* do. Thus, far from thwarting God's plans, Satan was helping fulfill them.

But doesn't that make Adam and Eve pawns in a game between God and the Satan? But I know that story, I thought. That's the story of Job.

We are not comfortable with the Book of Job. It greatly troubles us. And not only us. As Stephen Mitchell has pointed out, the book contains passages inserted by scholars and others attempting to tone down Job's blasphemy. We side more often with the comforters than with Job, as did a filmstrip I once saw in Sunday School—not an LDS filmstrip, but an LDS Sunday School—teaching Job as a story about

a man who has become alienated from God through sin and becomes reconciled through repentance.

Or we side with God against Job, perceiving his steadfast demands for an answer as a challenge to God, as a form of (there's that word again) blasphemy. I used to work with a man who was very much an Anglo-Catholic in the T. S. Eliot/C. S. Lewis tradition. He had a master's degree in literature, a keen desire to enter the Episcopal lay ministry, and a certain glee at how God puts Job down at the end of the book. Lowly worm, what right does Job think he has to question God?

I wonder why we see Job's demand for an answer as an attack on God? In his last speech before the whirlwind brings God to Job, Job expresses his faith that God will exonerate him. Perhaps we feel guilty for God; we've just heard him challenge Satan to do his worst, confident that Job will not curse God. Perhaps we feel compelled to defend God's honor.¹ Surely God wouldn't make Job go through all this hell just to win a bet. Would he?

I believe I first read the Book of Job in family home evening. I kept waiting for God to appear. I knew he would, and I knew he would tell Job why he had been suffering. Disappointed when God didn't mention the bet at all, I asked my father why. He replied that the author of Job was using a very old story as a framework to introduce a situation he wanted to explore and that the story wasn't important except to frame the situation.

Let me rephrase my question. Suppose I took an old, well-known story about a boy named George. George is boasting to his friend one day about how good his father is, and the friend says, 'Tell you what. You let me chop down his prize cherry tree and we'll just see how mild mannered he is.' George says, 'Okay, just don't burn down the house.' Well,

...the bet escalates; the friend does, of course, end up burning down the plantation; and after many harrowing misfortunes, George's father finally confronts his son and demands an explanation. George responds with, 'Just who do you think you're talking to? I'm the father of our country. I'm first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of my countrymen. You'll speak respectfully to me, *if at all*.'

What would we be reading in such a story? What genre? Satire, wouldn't we, and parody? Thus, the question that so intrigues me about the Book of Job, is: Why don't we read it as a satire? My father introduced Job to us in family home evening as a story designed to show that we shouldn't use people's suffering as evidence that they have sinned. But if our suffering can't be ascribed to our sins, then what meaning does our suffering have? Hence Job's insistent demand, "Show me my sin." For Job, *with his comforters*, believes that suffering is a punishment for sin. We are Job's comforters: we, too, believe that God has power to stop our suffering, and if he doesn't stop it, there must be a good reason. We do read the Book of Job as a satire, a satire of Job. Who does he think he is to question God?

We assume that the end of the book is a show of God's power and a stern rebuke to Job. But God never asks, "How dare you question me, lowly worm?" Indeed, the question he introduces himself with "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2) applies as well to the comforters as it does to Job. That we assume it is directed only at Job suggests something about our ambivalence toward him: We don't like his questioning God, but we recognize that the comforters don't deserve an answer.

Job does.

To be sure, God does ask Job a number of questions, "Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?" (Job 39:27; see also Isa. 40:31), for example. God's words to Job are so intense, so full of energy, that we forget this is the same Being who says "Light," and light begins, who says "Leviathan," and Job sees Leviathan, sees the antelope calving, sees the great behemoth, sees the warhorse pawing the ground in destruction. Job sees and hears the sons and daughters of God singing, shouting with the stars for joy. We forget that in our culture, being brought into the presence of God and

seeing a vision of all creation has a meaning not of rebuke but of covenant.

But why do we see God's arrival in the whirlwind as a symbol of his power? The whirlwind is an ancient symbol of chaos. We assume the whirlwind is some sort of megaphone, an instrument God uses to emphasize his speech. Perhaps it is just as likely that God is struggling to break out of the whirlwind, to make his voice heard over the roar of the wind.²

Does that seem blasphemous? Does it seem disrespectful to suggest that there are things in the world God cannot control? Think for a minute about the problem of suffering. When I studied literary theory and criticism with Marden Clark, he mentioned in class one day how important the problem of suffering has been to literature and literary criticism. In philosophical terms it's usually stated something like this:

There is suffering in the world, especially the suffering of innocent people. Three possibilities exist: There is no being powerful enough to prevent such suffering; there is a being with such power, but he *wants* innocent people to suffer—in which case God is evil and not worthy of our worship; or, God does not want innocent people to suffer but can't prevent or stop it—in which case God is powerless, and not worthy of our worship.

Now, after several years of carrying that definition around in the back of my mind, trying to figure out what it was that seemed so skewed about it, it occurred to me one day to ask, "When we say that if God doesn't have the power to stop suffering then he's not worthy of our worship, aren't we saying that we worship power, that only power is worthy of our worship?"

To be sure, the scriptures say a great deal about the power of God. But listen to the attributes of God that qualify one to work in the kingdom: After mentioning "faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God," the Lord exhorts Joseph Smith, Sr., to "remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience brotherly [and sisterly] kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence" (D&C 4:5-6). The thing a literary critic might notice there, about the obvious fact that power is not on the list, is that coming right after

the phrase "glory of God," the list of adjectives functions as a definition of the glory of God. Thus the omission of power from the list doesn't suggest that men have no power, but that power as an attribute of God is less important than any other attribute we may wish to revere, worship, or emulate.

If the problem of suffering is *the* major problem in philosophy (I know, big *if* there), perhaps it is the major problem not because suffering is so much with us and within us and around us and *because* of us, but because suffering focuses our attention so keenly on power, or at least on meaning. Any species that cares so much about meaning that its members gather regularly in formal discussions about the significance of human experience, of what it means to be a human and humane being—discussions of how we do and ought to live—I say any species that organizes such regular discussions, *and prints them*, surely has an intense desire to find and express meaning in life.

Trying to make sense of painful experiences leads to the question of why they happen, and what can be done to prevent them. But if preventing them is beyond our power—who can prevent drought, flood, earthquake, whirlwind?—then who has the power? Traditionally we have invested God with that power. Job and his comforters all agree that God has power to either cause or take away suffering. Their disagreement isn't over whether suffering is a punishment for sin (they all assume it is), but over whether *Job* has sinned.

The idea that God has absolute power has some interesting consequences. It creates the problem of suffering as a *philosophical problem*. I didn't say that the idea of an absolutely powerful God creates the problem of suffering. I said it makes the problem of suffering into a philosophical problem. The comforters do indeed start out as comforters:

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came everyone from his own place . . . to mourn with him and to comfort him.

And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

So they sat with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw his grief was very great. (Job 2:11-13)

When Job speaks, and they try to respond philosophically to Job's speech, they cease being comforters and become accusers. Since Job and the comforters all agree that suffering comes from God, the only response they can give is to accuse someone. When they mourn with him that mourns and comfort him that stands in need of comfort, they are fine; but when they try to approach the question through argument, they cannot sustain their sympathy. I have said before that satire is a part of LDS worship (Clark). I want to read you a piece of Latter-day satire from a sermon:

And also, ye yourselves will succor those who stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition unto you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

Perhaps thou shalt say: The man hath brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this that same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have . . . ? (Mosiah 4:17-19)

This gives a new twist to the old saw about beggars and choosers. *All* choosers are beggars.

"The man hath brought upon himself his own misery." That's a pretty good summary of the arguments of Job's comforters.

In response to their argument, Job asks, "Will ye speak wickedly for God? And talk deceitfully for him?" (Job 13:7) He knows he does not deserve this suffering as some punishment for sin. The comforters' response is "Job, you're in denial." Job refuses to accept guilt he does not own and, because he believes that suffering comes from God, steadfastly demands of God why he is causing Job this suffering.

Apparently we believe as Job and his friends do, that God's power is absolute. I think back to my Episcopal friend's response to Job, to his and others' sense that Job's demand for an answer from God is a challenge to God's power, an affront to God. But

what if Job's questions are an expression of faith? Read Job's summation, the part just before the voice answers from the whirlwind. Job repeatedly declares his faith that if God were to come down and stand before them, he would exonerate Job.

Exactly that happens, though certainly not in the way Job thought it would if God were to stand before him and answer.

If concentrating on God's power leads us to place blame when we see suffering, it also deprives us of the ability to see the ceremonial aspects of the Book of Job. My father's comment that the Jovan poet took an old story as a framework suggests there is an archetypal structure to the book. A culture often expresses its archetypes in ceremony. Let me suggest a ceremonial outline for Job:

Begins in heaven.

Job is cast out of his Edenic innocence.

The teachers of lies come to him.

He argues with them about the lies they teach him.

He prays to God for deliverance.

God sends a heavenly messenger—Himself.

He silences the teachers of lies. (Note that the comforters don't speak again. Job does.)

God instructs Job in the truth. *Important:* Job believes the same lie the comforters do: that suffering is a punishment for sin. Job's belief in this lie is one reason God introduces himself to Job by asking, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2)

While being instructed in the truth, Job is taken into the presence of the Lord. He then returns with a boon, a gift, the power to mediate between God and the comforters.

Blake is perceptive in showing Job's wife as participant. In his plate 13, she is in the whirlwind with him, both looking at God, while the comforters, eyes to the ground, raise their arms in submission, as if everything God says in Chapter 38 is directed at them. This interpretation moves me. For a Latter-day Saint, God's instruction to the comforters that they should bring sacrifice to Job (42:8), is interesting: One offers sacrifices to a god. This commandment thus implies the exaltation of Job and his wife.

At the end of the book, Job has received every-

thing back and more, as befits an exalted being, but this means we're back at the beginning. It could start over again. One of the perils of being a God—or a human—is that suffering can always start anew.

Job is an equal of God, a peer. No, it is not blasphemy to say that. Consider this slightly emended passage from Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man and the woman are become as one of us, to know good and evil." To eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil is to become like God. What fruit does knowing good and evil bear within us? What does it mean to eat something? "Press forward, feasting upon the words of Christ," Nephi exhorts us (2 Nephi 31:20). And Jacob commands us to "feast upon his love" (Jacob 3:2). To feast upon something is to make it part of our bodies, part of our beings, part of our awareness of the world.

And what does it mean to know something? Throughout the Bible, the verb related to procreation, to the desire to become parents, is *know*. To know something is not simply to be aware of it, as we all know that we ought to brush our teeth twice a day and see the dentist every six months and exercise every day, and get a complete physical checkup every year, and not continually add to our debts, both personal and national. To know something is to make a deep commitment to the knowledge. To know good and evil and to choose good is to have a commitment to good as strong as one's commitment to a spouse.

When God says that Adam and Eve have chosen to know good and evil, and have thus become as God, he is talking about the moral quality, the goodness, of their choice. Job has chosen good as well: "A perfect and an upright man who feareth God and escheweth evil."

Is it possible that when God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, he is speaking as an equal to an equal? "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" hardly sounds like God is talking to an equal.

But listen to what Job has said about God: "He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me" (Job 16:9).

There is some ambiguity as to whether Job is referring to God as his enemy, or to his enemies in

general, but listen as the speech continues:

God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked.

I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark.

His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground.

He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant.

I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust.

My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelides is the shadow of death. (Job 16:11-16)

No, I'm not saying that Job deserves God's harshness for speaking harshly of God. I'm simply saying that Job is part of the same tradition as Jacob, who wrestled as an equal all night with God, until God broke Jacob's hold with an illegal move, gave Jacob a sacred wound, and left him. Though God and Job speak harshly, they speak equally; and though God silences Job, he leaves him with a sacred wound.

I called the Book of Job a ceremony of irony. Once of the intense ironies is that the language which invokes Job's vision is so rich, we forget to see the images invoked by the words.

God is giving Job a vision of what it means to be God, of what it is like to be God. Now to someone raised in the LDS tradition with the first chapter of Moses, the vision of Nephi on the mountain, the Oliv Leaf of Joseph Smith and various other visions, the Transfiguration, the conversation of God with Cain, about to murder Abel, and so on, a vision of God and the possibilities and choices and sacrifices involved in choosing to live like God, knowing good and evil, to someone raised, I say, in such a tradition, a vision of God has prophetic significance.

Someone not of that tradition might suggest that what I've said is a fairly complete perversion of the Book of Job. That may be, but the kind of interpreting I have done is also in the oldest tradition of Christian scriptural exegesis, a tradition that grew out of Jewish exegetical practices.

I assume the first Christian exegete was St.

Matthew, he for whom Bach had a passion. Matthew was clearly writing to people who knew the Hebrew scriptures. "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:23) establishes the pattern of this Gospel: Matthew interprets the events in Jesus' life as fulfillments of Messianic prophecies. Note that what the passage may have meant to the original author or audience is less relevant to Matthew than what it means in the context of Jesus's life. Consider this comment on Herod's slaughter of the innocents: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken of by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2:17-18).

Jeremiah was not talking about a massacre, but about Rachel's grief at seeing her children go to exile in Babylon as she had seen Joseph and Benjamin go to exile in Egypt. In making Rachel's weeping emblematic of the grief of women in Bethlehem, Matthew was also interpreting scripture for his people and time, finding a way to convey to his people the light and knowledge he had for them.

I believe that understanding earlier cultures and writing, or the earlier writing of our culture, in terms of our own culture, and understanding our own culture as a reflection of earlier cultures is a legitimate purpose of scriptural exegesis. I assume this position is open to controversy of all sorts, but my concerns here are with the sharing of a heritage, so I will conclude with a story, not an argument. Nine years ago I wrote a story called "The Covenant Breaker," in which one character, telling why Joseph Smith never discovered treasure, says, "That's because when Adam sailed down the Chemung and up the Susquehanna to dedicate this land for the restoration of the Gospel he said a prayer on Carantouan that Joseph Smith would never find any treasure. He didn't want the boy's head to be turned by wealth." When my character said that, I knew I had to tell the story of Adam and Eve's voyage around the world to summon their children to Adam-Ondi-Ahman, accompanied by a very young Methusaleh, scarcely a hundred years old. In this scene they have been telling him what happened in the Garden of

Eden, and why they left.

"One day," Eve said, "when Adam came back from the fields, we sat and stared at each other for a long time, and finally both said, 'How did Satan know?' We called upon the name of our Father for many days to understand this thing, for it troubled us greatly. After many days—I want you to understand how unusual this was—after many days, Father and Mother both came (this was very unusual) and stood before us.

There was silence for a space, until we asked, "You knew the serpent was listening. Why did you speak to him through us? Why could you not keep him out of the garden?"

After a time, Father spoke: "There was in the land of Uz a man named Job. Whole he was and upright he stood before the Lord. Until Satan one day stood before the Lord. Had you given me all you have given Job, would not I, even I, honour you? Let me reach my hand out and take it, and Job will stand before you and curse you.

"And Satan did. But Job blessed the name of the Lord.

"And Satan stood before the Lord and said, Behold the family of Job. Would not I, even I, bless you, had you given me such a family as Job's. Would not I, even I, honour you? Let me reach my hand out and take it, And Job will stand before you and curse you.

"And Satan did. And Job knelt before the Lord and blessed the memory of his children and the name of the Lord.

"And Satan stood before the Lord and laughed at prostrate Job, and said, Behold the skin of Job. How comforting it is, all tanned and wise with age. No ticks. Nothing to itch. It holds his bones in, but does not bind them swelling the joints. Would not I, even I, bless you, had you given me such supple skin as Job's? Would not I, even I, honour you? Let me reach my hand out and take the comfort, and give instead boils, and Job will stand before you and curse you.

"And Satan did. And Job sat down in ashes, and took a broken pot and scraped himself and his dog licked Job's wounds.

"And Job's wife said, Curse God and die.

"But Job said, Were the All-loving to stand before me, He would smooth my skin, wipe my tears, wash my ashes."

Eve stopped. "Oh, that the All-loving would stand before me.' That's what he said, stand. But I must rest."

"Well, did he?" Methusaleh said.

"Certainly. And had a most wondrous vision. Have you ever seen great whales? When we get to the ocean perhaps."

"Continue the story, please," Methusaleh said.

"Another time," said Eve.

"But he didn't answer the question. He didn't say why he let Satan overhear. Or, or you haven't gotten that far?"

"Well, he never quite said. Didn't need to. You see, we understood he was talking about himself."

"Well, yes, of course. It begins with Satan standing before God," Methusaleh said.

"No, no," Eve said. "When Father finished speaking, I turned to my mother and asked her, 'Did you really tell him to curse God and die?' 'Yes I did,' she answered. 'Oh yes. Indeed I did. Yes.'"

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NOTES

1. See Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), chap. 1 for a discussion of explanations of suffering that seem more designed to "defend God" (p. 23) than to comfort the afflicted.

2. For a comment on God's struggle with Chaos, see Kushner 43.

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Feeding Stories to the Lion

Harlow Söderborg Clark

I suppose any essay called "Feeding Stories to the Lion" should begin with a story or two to keep the lion happy, so I want to tell you two stories that have gained resonance for me over the past ten years. In 1983 or 1984, Ray Carver published "A Small, Good Thing," a revised version of his story "The Bath." "A Small, Good Thing" was subsequently chosen for *The Pushcart Prize: The Best of the Small Presses*. In the introduction, the editor says that Carver felt impelled by the demands of his maturing art to take a story that was already well-known and revise it. In 1985 I took a poetry writing workshop from Tess Gallagher at the University of Washington who, during class, told us the truth of the matter. When Carver published "The Bath," his original editor, Gordon Lish, thought the story not sufficiently nihilistic or dark or pessimistic and made Carver change it. When Carver decided to publish the unexpurgated version of the story, rather than embarrass Lish, he said he had felt impelled by the maturing demands of his art to revise the story.

The second story happened in a fiction writing workshop. I had written a story about a philosophy major at BYU and his wife, an intelligent, witty, rather troubled couple. The day we were going to discuss it, I walked into the room and one of the women in the class said, "Are you a Mormon, Harlow?" "Yes." "Are you active?" "Yes." "Oh. Well then, you obviously know the culture better than I do. You can disregard what I wrote on your story." She told me her father had grown up a Mormon but had left the Church. "I have a lot of cousins in Idaho, and they're about the most ignorant people you ever met," she said, a perception that informed the comments she had made in the margins of my story, comments about the lack of intellectual curiosity among Mormon women. She also told me she hadn't thought BYU even had a Philosophy Department. A little later in the term another woman asked me if I ever wrote about anything besides Mormons.

"A little, but not much," I said.

This story resonates for me perhaps because I experience my culture as a storytelling culture. For the past twenty years I have sat through and taken notes on thousands of church meetings—maybe five or ten thousand, and I doubt there was a single one in which someone, or several, didn't tell a story, or several. What that fact means is that I experience my culture as a fully human culture: humans tell stories. It also means I experience my culture as a culture based in ideas. Even if the stories weren't told to bolster certain points in a talk or conversation, it is not possible to tell stories about your culture without exploring it intellectually, without exploring what it means to be part of a culture. One of the traditional values of literature, one that teachers always mention, is its ability to let us enter into another culture, a culture we consider different, and experience its full humanity, as we fully experience our own humanity. I wonder what it means about a culture if no one hears its stories, or if it refuses to hear the stories of another culture?

The first story I told resonates for me, a writer of distinctly western American temperament, partly because it illustrates what Lois Hudson, the director of my thesis, called "the damned eastern literary establishment" (I believe she got the phrase from David Wagoner), a phrase that reflected her perception that the people who control the American literary press are more concerned with angst, nihilism, loss, and alienation—that is, are more concerned with damnation and lonely individualism than with community and what it means for members of a society to commune one with another. More importantly, it resonates for me because it tells me about the perceptions that publishers and editors have of their audiences and what their audiences will accept. In 1991, the Association for Mormon Letters awarded its fiction prize to Walter Kirn's collection *My Hard Bargain*. Kirn was unable to come to the

AML meeting, so Dennis Clark read for him a couple of stories from *My Hard Bargain* at the traditional evening's reading. I was particularly impressed by the lyricism of "Whole Other Bodies," by the straightforward (nonironic, nonapologetic) description of a conversion. The narrator begins, "I remember the time of my family's conversion, that couple of months before He saved our souls forever," and ends with a description of his brother's hair sinking under the water in baptism: "That was the moment when God took him in entirely. It happened to all of us that day" (53, 58).

I had heard that the first story in *My Hard Bargain*, "Planetarium," was based on a striking image, and enjoyed it, but found it a bit confusing, if only because Mormons call their clergy "bishop," not "elder." The story is set in my hometown of Provo, Utah, during what seems to me the 1970s, but it doesn't feel like Provo. It feels more Midwestern. Ward basketball teams in Provo play each other, not the Evangelical Lutherans. I only know of one Lutheran church in Provo in the 1970s, and it wasn't Evangelical. But wards in the Midwest might very well play teams from other churches. I mentioned this to Dennis and told him it gave the story a somewhat surrealistic quality. He told me that Kirn originally set the story in Missouri, but his editor didn't think anyone would believe Mormons lived outside Utah and prevailed upon him to change the setting. Imagine an editor questioning whether people would believe Catholics live outside Massachusetts or Maryland.

Kirn's experience with his editor is not unique. In its March 1993 issue, *Sunstone* published Carol Lynn Pearson's "I Don't Want to Be a Mormon Anymore!"—a story about her sons climbing out on the roof one Sunday morning to sneak away into the hills so they wouldn't have to go to church. The essay is her meditation on what it means to a parent to have children who struggle with or reject their membership in the Church. The author's biographical note says: "An earlier version of this essay was first written as a chapter for *One on the Seesaw: The Ups and Downs of a Single Parent Family* but was rejected by the publishers as being 'too Mormon'" (53).

When I hear stories like this, I wonder what perceptions the publishers have of their audience?

What kind of readers are they imagining for the book? What perceptions are they imagining for their readers? All parents have a heritage to pass on to their children, things they want their children to know and believe and feel, ways they want their children to live. Did Pearson's publishers really think her readers would reject an exploration of the pain children can bring their parents by discarding their heritage just because that exploration was made in Mormon terms, even intimately Mormon terms?

For too many writers, I'm afraid the answer to that question is yes. In his review of the fiction anthology *Greening Wheat*, Eugene England called Dennis Clark "one of our most talented but so far least published writers" (200). Ten years later, this statement is still true. Dennis has published poems, reviews, a chapbook (*Tinder: Dry Poems*), and a poetry anthology, *Harvest*, with Eugene England, but no more of his stories. I have asked Dennis several times why he doesn't submit his fiction and poetry and other work to non-Mormon magazines and literary journals. He answers that his work is just too unusual. No one is interested in the kinds of things he writes. I remind him sometimes that when he sent "Answer to Prayer," the story from *Greening Wheat*, to *New American Review*, Theodore Solotaroff, didn't reject it. He said he wanted to publish it but *New American Review* was ceasing publication, and the last issue was already full.

I understand these fears and share them somewhat. Even though non-Mormon readers have responded positively to my work, I haven't submitted it to non-Mormon publishers. Maybe this is why I reacted so strongly to Phyllis Barber's *Dialogue* essay, "The Mormon Woman as Writer." Barber talks about the challenges both of trying to be a writer in the Mormon community and of trying to convey Mormon experience to an outside audience.

Writing for the world at large presents an unusual challenge to someone who has been raised on Mormon language/sensibility and who believes subconsciously that the most important value on earth is the upbuilding of the kingdom of God. If storytelling is rendered through this particular lens, many readers outside of the language and sensibility have no contextual awareness to inform them of the subtlety and nuance, even the high stakes being played out in the story.

"Stake center, bishop, Relief Society, testimony,

temple garments, missionary, sacrament meeting"—foreign words. A character's struggle between obedience to LDS principles and obedience to self, or the struggle with emotions of fear/anger because of a bishop's interview—these are tempests in a teapot to the outside observer.

An observer can say, "What about Chaim Potok, Philip Roth, Mary Gordon, Graham Greene—Jewish and Catholic writers? People are interested in them." As I understand it, Judaism and Catholicism are much more universal, much more ancient and puzzling to the public mind than is Mormonism, which many consider a quaint, odd, right-wing cult, mainly known by its oddities, its yellow headlines—the stories of modern-day polygamy (which is all many people "know" of the religion), Mark Hofmann, and the Singer/Swapp clan. (113-14)

My first reaction was anger at what I felt was an unfair invoking of Chaim Potok's name only to dismiss him. In both *The Promise* and *My Name is Asher Lev*, Potok shows particular skill in making "the subtlety and nuance" of Jewish situations available to his non-Jewish readers and of helping them understand what is at stake in a situation. Barber's comment seemed an evasion of the responsibility writers have to open up the culture they write about (or create) to outsiders. When I had thought about it for a few minutes, though, I began to wonder, "What if the readers just don't want to know? No matter how fine the writing is then, they won't read." To paraphrase Matthew Arnold, that is where a critic can function at the present time. More about this later.

Perhaps when I read this article I had heard of Phyllis Barber's problems getting *And the Desert Shall Blossom* (Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1991) published. I certainly had by the time I read Margaret Young's review of Barber's *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir*. I had also heard about Margaret's problems in trying to interest a New York publisher in *Salvador* (Murray, Utah: Aspen Books, 1992). In 1992 when my father published *Liberating Form* with Aspen Books, Curtis Taylor gave him a copy of *Salvador* and mentioned some of the problems Margaret Young had had with the New York publishers before she offered her book to Aspen. Indeed, in Young's review of *How I Got Cultured*, she talks of commiserating with Phyllis Barber over the hard-heartedness of New York publishers. The University

of Utah Press finally published *And the Desert Shall Blossom*, but its director recently announced the discontinuance of its—choose a word here: *acclaimed, prestigious, fine, unprofitable*—series in Mormon studies. Whether that includes Mormon novels, I don't know.

Now there is good news mixed in this last paragraph, for *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir*, a memoir about growing up in the West and growing up Mormon, was published by the very nonwestern, non-Mormon University of Georgia Press. And before that, it won the Associated Writing Program's Award for Creative Nonfiction, a very non-Mormon award for a book so steeped in Mormon culture.

But I sometimes wonder how editors in a western state would have reacted to the book. I asked Margaret Young whether her problems with the New York publishers and the revisions they had asked of her had specifically to do with the Mormon content of *Salvador*. She said she didn't remember their objections as having specifically to do with the Mormon themes of the novel, but that she did have a story about *Elegies & Love Songs*, which won the publication award in the Utah State Writing Competition and was published by the University of Idaho Press in 1992. Concerning two stories, "Elegy for John Donne" and "Grandma's Dying," one of the editors there had written, "Why do these folks have to be Mormon?" Margaret's reaction: "Why can't they be? Don't Mormons deserve a fictional life?" She later told me, "I ended up thinking, This lady is a bigot."

There's ample evidence that, to some non-Mormon publishers, the answer to the question, "Don't Mormons deserve a fictional life?" is, "No." When I asked John Bennion about his experiences with non-Mormon publishers, he told me he had discussed the novel he is currently working on with Phyllis Barber and François Camoin's agent, and the agent said that, when he sent *And the Desert Shall Blossom* around to twenty publishers, he had been unable to interest even one of them. Bennion told me that there is a feeling that Mormon novels, novels that grapple with Mormon issues, just don't sell.

But if there's good evidence that publishers either don't see Mormons as people living complex

human lives or believe their readers don't see Mormons that way—that is, if there's good evidence that publishers make their decisions based on stereotypes—there is also, as Margaret Young reminded me, the counter-example of Orson Scott Card and novels like *Last Boys* and *The Folk of the Fringe* (New York: Tor, 1989). *Last Boys* begins, "This is what his father always called him whenever he'd done something bad" (1). Each chapter begins, "This is . . ." Each chapter begins, that is, with a sentence based on the rhythm of "This is the house that Jack built," a sentence Card never uses, but one that gains a great presence in the novel. Like a cumulative nursery rhyme, the story builds up a picture of the Fletcher family, the ward they live in, i.e., their part in a community of belief, the southern culture they move into, and the town they live in, Step's job, and the industry he works in.

The details about Mormon beliefs and group life are quite intimate, as intimate as anything in the *Sunstone* version of the chapter Carol Lynn Pearson's publishers rejected as too Mormon. Card even has a subplot about what the idea of becoming gods means to one of the characters. Moreover, *Last Boys* has the feel of a didactic Mormon novel. One of the ironies of the novel, one that would delight LDS readers, but that (publishers might fear) non-Mormons might not appreciate is that at times Step and Deanne Fletcher seem to have come straight out of the Family Home Evening manual or the *Ensign*. They are the wise, loving couple, earnestly striving to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and the love of their parents. Step shows unflinching courage in confronting Stevie's evil teacher and the evil folks at Eight Bits, Inc., where he works. Step and Deanne both show courage in confronting the evil Delores LeSueuer—and for Card, she really is "the sewer." They are the unfailingly supportive, perfect parents, except that they refuse to believe that Stevie's invisible friends are real. They fear for his sanity and thus are unable to give him the support he most needs. Like Shakespeare saying, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," Card uses the conventions of a tradition to both critique and parody the tradition and to add to it, carry it on.

I hope Card's success bodes well for other distinctly Mormon novels, especially when I remem-

ber the troubles he had about twelve years ago when *Saints* had to become *A Woman of Destiny* (complete with passionate embrace on the back cover, and the question "Was this desire a blessing . . . or a sin?" greeting anyone who opened the front cover) to be acceptable. A successful novel can make easier the birth in ink and paper or cloth covers of other novels. A friendly critic can do the same. I will close with a story about that situation and a story about my own experiences with publishers' perceptions of their audience.

One day Tess Gallagher walked into class and passed out photos of skeletons dressed in fashion clothing. They were paintings a friend of hers had done. Tess then read us an essay she had written about the paintings, comparing them to the poetry of various poets, saying that they were what those poets' poems would be like if they were paintings instead of poems.¹ She told us that her friend was having trouble because people considered her subject matter too bizarre. Writing an essay that creates a context for someone's work is something a critic can do for an artist, Tess told us.

I believe critics can do much to help novels get published, not simply sold (or not sold). I have written elsewhere of our need for a Perry Miller or Vernon Louis Parrington (255), but there is much editors can do as well. Consider Ray Carver's Pushcart Prize for "A Small, Good Thing." *The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses* is published annually by Pushcart Press, an enterprise dedicated to encouraging small presses and little magazines. It invites small presses and little magazines to nominate works by sending tearsheets of the best essays, stories, poems, and so forth that they publish in the year. Pushcart keeps a running index of works nominated and of all presses and magazines that nominate someone for the prize. I have never seen *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *BYU Studies*, *Inscape*, *Wasatch Review International*, *Exponent II*, *BYU Today*, or the *Ensign* on that list, though all have published work I would have nominated.² Though I am not as familiar with *Weber Studies*, I think it has also published much that ought to be nominated. I have also seen fine writing in magazines like *This People* and *Latter-day Digest*. If you have anything to do with any of these magazines, please consider submitting to the Pushcart Prize.³

But what does all this have to do with feeding stories to the lion? Why choose a title like that, suggesting that trying to publish is as risky as feeding a lion? About 1982 in Dean Hughes's class on writing for children, I wrote a story about a boy named Daniel who tells his parents one night that there is a lion under his bed who will either eat them or eat stories. In 1993 at the Wasatch Review Writers' Convention I gave a copy of "Daniel's Lion" to a publisher who had come to AML Symposium six months earlier seeking new talent. A few months later, I got a call from Giles Florence, telling me how much everyone at his publishing firm had enjoyed the story and asking about my plans for it. I told him that since the Lion tells Daniel he expects a story from his mother tomorrow night, I had the first of a group of bedtime stories and would like to publish a series of children's stories with illustrations. Giles began searching for an artist and getting printing estimates. By the end of 1994, a letter from the publisher asked for biographical information and expressed the desire to move forward with the publication.

However, since then Giles Florence migrated to another publisher, and his successor told me that while everyone still loved the book, they just couldn't see publishing it because of the cost of full color printing and the brevity of the story. She told me that people don't like to pay for so few words, and suggested adding a few stories. I find this perception of audience most intriguing since "Daniel's Lion" has probably as many words as Chris Van Allsburg's *Jumanji* and many more than Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever*, Janet and Allen Ahlberg's *Each Peach Pear Plum*, and many other books of few words that many have been willing to pay for. The editor also said that, since we hadn't signed a contract, I was free to consider other publishers, maybe even a non-Mormon publisher, with a few minor changes. But I probably won't send it to a non-Mormon publisher. Grow it at home.

I will close by reading part of "Daniel's Lion," the extra bedtime story Daniel finally prevails upon his father to tell.

"Well," said Daniel's father, "after Daniel got out of the lions' den, some people got mad and threw him back in."

"Why did they throw him back in?"

He killed their sacred snake. So anyway, he was in the pit . . ."

"How?"

"What?"

"How did he kill their sacred snake? And what kind of a snake was it, anyway? Was it like one of those long green snakes at the zoo?"

"I don't know what color it was, Daniel. What does it matter anyway?"

"Because some snakes are nicer than others. And besides, my Primary teacher told us that we shouldn't go killing snakes. She said if we kill all the snakes, they will never lose their venom, and they'll never learn how to love us. That's what Joseph Smith said."

"Well, I'm sure Daniel apologized to the snake when he got up to heaven. You see, these people were worshipping the snake as a god, and Daniel wanted to prove the snake wasn't a god, so he took some hair and tar and fat and boiled them up into a ball and fed it to the snake, and the snake died."

"Poor snake," Daniel said.

Daniel's father thought for a moment. "Well I suppose that's what the people who worshipped the snake thought, so they threw him back into the lions' den. And he was there for six days without any food. (Course, the lions didn't get anything to eat either.)"

"He must've had some good stories to tell."

"Yes, but after six days without food, it's kind of hard to tell stories, so the Lord sent the prophet Habakkuk all the way from Jerusalem to Babylon to feed him."

"How far is that?"

"About as far as from California to New York."

"It isn't that far, dear," Daniel's mother said.

"It is when an angel's carrying you by the hair."

"That must've hurt."

"Why didn't he take a plane, dear?" Daniel's mother asked.

"Angels fly faster. Besides, I'm sure the angel was very gentle with him. Now, Daniel, here's the important part. After Daniel had eaten, he said, 'Now I know the Lord takes care of the people who love him.' Daniel, you love the Lord, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you pray to the Lord, he'll shut the mouth of the lion."

Daniel knelt by the bed. "Heavenly Father," he

began, "my father doesn't believe there's a lion under my bed, but I know you do. Please let the lion not bite my daddy."

Daniel gave his father a hug. "I love you, Daddy. The Lord told me the lion won't eat you. You tell a good story."

Daniel hugged and kissed his mother. "Tomorrow night you have to tell the story. It's gotta be extra good."

Daniel crawled into bed. It was still lumpy so he reached his hand down and started petting the lion. As the lion relaxed and spread his body out on the floor, the lumps in Daniel's bed disappeared, and soon both he and the lion were snoring in unison.

And in good Mormon fashion, an exhortation: May we all feed the lion. May the angel of the Lord not have to drag us by the hair of our heads (or chins) to the feeding. And may we all eat the food of the lion.

HARLOW SÖDERBORG CLARK is father of Mason, Andrew, and Matthew, husband of Donna, and a freelance scholar and fiction writer who ventures occasionally into personal essays and poetry and teaches as adjunct faculty at Utah Valley State College, Orem, Utah. This essay is part of Harlow's ongoing research about writers' dealings with publishers, and publishers' perceptions of their audience, and of Latter-day Saints. He invites any stories you would be willing to share and can be reached on the Internet as zclarkha@uvsc.edu or at 955 South 500 East, Pleasant Grove, UT 84062. This paper was delivered at the conjoint meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 20 October 1995, in Spokane, Washington.

NOTES

1. In all the databases I've searched using Tess Gallagher as the search term, I haven't found this article, nor do I know the painter's name. I would appreciate hearing from anyone familiar with the paintings I've described.

2. Apparently the running index isn't perfect. Volume 13 makes special mention of Phyllis Barber's "Wild Sage," nominated by *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.

3. "Nominations for this series are invited from any small, independent literary book press or magazine in the world. Up to six nominations—tear sheets or copies, selected from works published or about to be published, in the calendar year—are accepted by our December 1 deadline each year. Write to Pushcart Press, P.O. Box 380, Wainscott, NY 11975 for more information." I am pleased that the editor of *High Plains Literary Review* nominated Bruce Jorgensen's "Who Tarzan, Who Jane" for the Pushcart Prize. Bruce told me that Hodgson Van Wagoner has also been nominated.

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